

# HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

## The Entire Book

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## CHAPTER 1 – THE TRIP

It was the most wonderful feeling Harry ever experienced. He was flying through the air, feeling the wind blow by and through his entire body. The warm sun was glowing all over him and some birds were flying by, singing merrily. He raced them, not knowing where to, just knowing he was having the best time of his life. As Harry was shooting ahead, he looked forward, and saw a thin line on the ground. Harry threw his hands back, getting a sudden burst of speed. He was going far faster than the birds now, he could hear their voices trailing behind him, getting farther and farther behind him. The thin line was getting closer as Harry sped up. As he got nearer to it, the Sun's warmth became slightly colder, and the wind was blowing much harder. Despite this, he continued on, having a huge desire to see what the line was dividing.

Harry suddenly realized that he was shivering, and his teeth were chattering. The wind was approaching the speeds of that of a hurricane. It just kept blowing harder and harder, until Harry was unable to fight against it any longer. So, he fell.

He was falling, falling, falling. Faster, faster and faster. The ground was rushing at him. He fell through the clouds, and could just about make out the top of some houses. He could see some cars. Now, he can make out someone below him. Harry abruptly realized what was happening, and he let out a scream, anticipating the painful impact... when all of a sudden he felt hands below him.

Someone caught him. Harry let out a sigh of relief. The hands below him felt bony and weak, they were concealed in a long flowing black robe. Harry looked up to see the face that went with the arms, and as soon as his eyes met the face, he wished he hadn't been caught at all. It felt as though there was a brick in his stomach that suddenly moved up out of his mouth, escaping with a scream. The face belong to Voldemort. He merely gave Harry a small grin.

Harry jumped out of Voldemort's hands, and started running away. Green rays were shooting by him, and Harry recognized the green rays as killing curse beams. He kept running, not knowing where he was going. All of a sudden, he saw someone! Two people actually, a man and a woman... they looked very familiar.

Harry ran as fast as he could towards them, spells still shooting by him every second. All Harry did was try and concentrate on the people ahead of him. As soon as he got a little closer to them, he realized who they were... they were his parents.

The woman was tall, and had red hair and unmistakable green eyes. She was cradling a bundle of blankets in her arms... it looked like a baby. Next to her, there was an even taller skinny man with untidy black hair. He was staring down at the bundle of blankets.

What were they doing here? Weren't they... dead? All of these questions were running through Harry's mind when he suddenly remembered how he had gotten to see his parents in the first place. Voldemort!

"We have to get out of here!" Harry yelled to them. But, it was as if he didn't even say anything... or exist for that matter. His mom kept cradling the bundle of blankets, and his dad was just watching her.

"Voldemort's here!" yelled Harry as loud as he could. "We have to go!"

This time, they looked at him, and Harry felt relief come over him. Then, he felt a hand come over his shoulder, and squeeze down hard. He didn't even have to turn around to see who it was that was holding onto him... the bony fingers gave it all away.

"Give me the boy..." Voldemort hissed.

"You already know we won't," said Harry's dad.

"We had an agreement," said his mom, setting the bundle down into a cradle next to her that seemed to have just appeared. What agreement? Harry never knew that his parents had ever made some sort of deal with Voldemort.

"Yes, well... that agreement did not benefit me enough to continue it," said Voldemort. "I would rather just take the boy now."

"Never," said both of Harry's parents together.

"If you will not give him to me, then I will take him by force!" yelled Voldemort, brandishing his wand. Harry saw his father immediately respond by taking his out too. But, he wasn't fast enough.

"Avada Kedavra!" yelled Voldemort. The familiar green flash brightened the white oblivion round them... where had the world gone? It seemed to have all just disappeared.

That was the last thing on Harry's mind, though. He saw his father be hit by the Killing Curse, and fall to the ground with a large thud. He was dead.

"No! James!" yelled Harry's mom, running over to him.

"Now give me the boy and you shall live," said Voldemort, pointing his wand right at Harry's mom.

"I shall never hand him over to you, even if it means my death!" she said.

"Very well then..." said Voldemort. "Avada Kedavra!"

The world flashed green again, and Harry's mom collapsed to the floor, right on top of James. Voldemort walked over to the cradle that the baby version of Harry was in. He gave a sickening version of a smile, and pointed his wand right at Harry, and mumbled the Killing Curse.

Suddenly, there was a massive explosion like none Harry had ever experienced before. It was as if a nuclear bomb went off right in front of his eyes. The entire world turned black for an instant, and Voldemort, and his mom and dad were blown away. It lasted for only a second though... and Harry was back in his white, infinite oblivion... all alone this time.

"Harry...", came a voice. It was a soft, soothing voice that was barely loud enough to be heard. Harry ran toward where he thought the voice was coming from, though the world around him was appearing to get lighter.

"Harry..." This time, the voice was slightly louder. Harry ran faster... maybe it was his mom! Maybe she didn't die after all! The voice rang out again, and again and Harry ran faster and faster, not caring that he was getting tired.

"Harry!", yelled the voice. It was not soothing at all this time, it was instead very harsh and loud. The world around Harry was spinning now, with many colors. The voice was yelling at him almost every second, and the world was coming into a blurry focus. Harry shook his head, rubbed his eyes and looked around. He was in a small room... in a bed... with pajamas on... what was going on?

It now came to Harry that he had been dreaming, and was back now in his real life. However, Harry's real life is nothing like ours. Harry is a wizard. Though, not a full wizard yet. He is still a student at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Harry threw his covers off himself, and climbed groggily out of bed. Every second he moved, he lost more and more memory of the dream he had. He remembered seeing his mom... and something about Voldemort... but that was it.

He groped around the table next to his bed for his glasses and put them on. Now his room came into focus and he walked over to his closet to pick out some clothes.

"HARRY!", yelled the voice. Now Harry knew who was making it, his Aunt Petunia. His door exploded open and she blasted through.

"Harry get down here this- oh!", she saw Harry while he was changing his pants and all he had on was his underwear. She quickly backed out of the room and yelled, just as loudly as before, "Get downstairs now! It's Dudley's birthday, and you're late! We need you to make breakfast!"

Harry heard her go downstairs. Harry quickly finished changing into his clothes and went to the door. He opened it, and turned around to look at his room before he went down. It contained many things that would be in our dreams: there was a cauldron by his bed that contained books on magic. Next to the window in his room was an owl cage that contained Harry's owl, Hedwig. She was a snowy white owl that was used to send and receive letters. Harry's two most recent letters were on his wall next to Hedwig. One was from Hermione Granger, one of Harry's best friends from Hogwarts. It read:

Dear Harry,

Since I won't be able to send you another letter soon, happy birthday. I am having a great time here with Viktor at his house, I hope you are doing well with your aunt and uncle. Even though I've been with Viktor, I have been doing a lot of thinking, especially about what Dumbledore said last year. Since You-Know-Who (most wizards were too afraid to use Voldemort's real name, so they said 'You-Know-Who' instead) is back, you'll have to be extra careful since you do seem to run into him often. I've also been wondering about what the jobs are that Dumbledore sent everyone to do. I guess we'll find out this September.

Sincerely,  
Hermione

That letter was exactly like Hermione. Always worried and concerned, though never forgetting to do work. However, she did have some good points. Harry was wondering about what Dumbledore said last year. He sent Hagrid (the groundskeeper at Hogwarts) on a secret Summer job, he sent Professor Snape (Harry's potion's teacher who was Harry's only reason to dislike Hogwarts) as some sort of spy to Voldemort, and Dumbledore asked the rest of the professors to "gather the old crowd".

Harry was also surprised, in reading Hermione's letter, that she did go to Krum's mansion for the Summer. Viktor Krum is an excellent Quidditch player, he is the Seeker on the Bulgarian Quidditch team, the same position Harry plays on the Hogwarts Gryffindor House's Quidditch team. At the end of the year, she said she was still

“thinking about it”, so Harry assumed she wasn’t going to go. He couldn’t wait to get back to Hogwarts and ask her all about it.

The other letter on Harry’s wall was from his other best friend at Hogwarts, Ron Weasley. It read:

Hey Harry! Hope you’re well, I know we’re not doing too good here. That money you gave Fred and George last year, I’m not sure if that was such a good idea. They now seem more determined than ever to set up their joke shop, and since they got so much money from you for funding, mom can’t object to them doing it. Every day, it seems, they have some new invention that they’re more than willing to test out on us. When we’re not turning into an animal or something from eating a candy, our faces turn green, or we grow an extra ear on our forehead.

Because of the chaos here, I doubt we’ll be able to come over and help you if the Muggles try and keep you from coming back to Hogwarts, or just make you miserable. So, I gave Pig a map that leads you from your house to our house. It took a while to make since dad’s Muggle maps can’t talk. I hope you don’t have to use it in an emergency, but go ahead and use it to get here for fun!

See ya soon!

Ron

Harry had the map in his pocket at all times, just in case he needed it. Even though the names of the roads and towns were written very messily, Harry guessed he could just fly to the Weasley’s house on his broomstick if he really had to.

Harry couldn’t help but laugh when he came to the part about Fred and George’s joke shop. Last year, Fred and George (Ron’s older identical twin brothers) decided they wanted to open up a joke store (called Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes) and make their living doing that. Mrs. Weasley, whose other three sons had graduated from Hogwarts and gone into “respectable” businesses (except for maybe Charlie who bred Dragons), would have nothing to do with their joke shop idea and destroyed all their inventions. Later that year, Harry won a tournament at school, and got a thousand galleons (quite a sum of money in the wizarding world). Already having a small fortune inherited from his parents, Harry gave the money to Fred and George to support their business since he liked the idea.

“HARRY! GET DOWN HERE NOW!” came a giant booming voice from downstairs. The voice belonged to his Uncle Vernon, obviously upset that Harry had taken so long to come down. However, Harry was used to this kind of treatment. The Dursley’s hated magic in any form and, because of this, they despised Harry.

So, even though Harry was used to this way of communication, he thought it best to not upset Uncle Vernon any more, and he started on his way downstairs, which turned out to be a good deal more difficult than other trips doing the same. Every step was littered with wrapping paper, boxes, cards, tape, bubble wrap, and even some forgotten presents. Though he tripped twice (once on a box, and on a shirt), Harry eventually made his way to the bottom of the staircase, and headed to the kitchen where he tended to the bacon and pancakes on the stove. His cousin, Dudley was sitting at the table that was an island in the sea of wrappings. He was opening another present right now.

"Oooh another present! I wonder what it could be!" said Dudley as he tore open the next box in a giant pile next to him. Within two seconds, the present was open, and Dudley pulled out a giant red shirt. "Oh no, not another one!"

"Another XXXXXXXL shirt Dudley?" laughed Uncle Vernon as Dudley began opening his next gift. "Well then, just be glad that you can't wear them anymore anyway." It was true though. Last Summer, Dudley might have been too small for that shirt but, since his school, Smeltings, did not store uniforms in that size, Dudley was forced on an extreme diet that must've been enforced throughout his entire year there due to the amazing amount of weight he lost. Dudley was just a little bigger than Harry now, who was extremely skinny after being practically starved by the Dursleys for ten years.

"Yes!" said Dudley after opening his latest present. It was evidently some video game he had wanted as that was the only thing that could make Dudley so happy. Then, when Dudley reached for his next present, he let out a shriek.

"Ah! There's only one left! Oh, but it's a big one!" Dudley walked over to the giant box which was at least as tall as Harry, and about five times as wide. Dudley climbed on top, and ripped the ribbon off as fast as he could. Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon were smiling in the back.

"Oh man! This one's gotta be good!" Dudley threw off the last of the wrapping to reveal...

"Another box!" yelled Dudley. This made Harry look over from the stove. Wrapped in the box that Dudley had just opened was another box that was identical to the previous one in every way, except for the fact that it was smaller. However, this did not make Dudley any less determined, in fact he looked as though this was a present he really wanted to conquer.

Just as Dudley threw off the ribbon of the latest box, Harry let out a laugh. Another box was inside that one, once again, identical to the last. Dudley quickly ripped through that one, and the present inside was again a box.

This continued for fourteen more boxes until Dudley, looking like he might explode at any second, opened the last one which was about the size of a hamburger. Instead of there being another box inside, there was an envelope. Dudley opened it, and nearly fainted.

"Oh... my... god!" he stuttered. Harry walked away from the stove and over towards the presents to see what could have possibly made Dudley speechless.

"Get away from those boy!" yelled Uncle Vernon, "we didn't get one for you!"

"What?" asked Harry, "one... one what?" questioned Harry.

"Tickets! A ticket!" replied Uncle Vernon.

"Tickets, to where?" asked Harry.

"To... to... Hawaii!" yelled Dudley. He held up the three tickets that were bright yellow with hula dancers on them.

"Wow, that's great. I think I'll just explode with happiness due to the fact that I'M NOT GOING!" yelled Harry. Even though he had never gone with the Dursley's on any of their trips, they had never rubbed it in his face so much.

"That's right you're not going!" said Aunt Petunia. "We're taking YOU to Mrs. Figg's house next week, when we leave."

Harry was not going to put up with this. It was almost his fifteenth birthday, and he didn't have to deal with his Aunt and Uncle's dictatorship over him anymore.

“NO!”, yelled Harry as loud as he could, his Aunt and Uncle looked appalled.

“HOW DARE YOU TALK BACK-” said Uncle Vernon before he was cut off.

“No! I’m NOT going to go to Mrs. Figg’s, I’m going to Ron’s house!” said Harry as he started running back upstairs, avoiding the presents. He could hear Uncle Vernon behind him, closing in.

All Harry has to do was grab the map, his owl, and fly out on his broomstick, and the Dursleys would not be able to do anything about it. Nothing they owned could fly, and they would not pursue him into wizard lands anyway.

Just as Harry reached the door, he felt Uncle Vernon’s presence right behind him. Harry threw open the door, and saw the strangest sight he ever saw: his owl was fighting with a black phoenix.

The phoenix was about five times as large as Hedwig, and a million times darker. It wasn’t just black, it was a pure-black, with dark flames coming out all around it. It had an unnaturally long beak with small sharp teeth all around it. It was pulling Hedwig apart, feathers and blood were everywhere.

Just then, the phoenix stopped fighting with Hedwig, and looked at Harry. There was an explosion of piercing, white-hot pain in Harry’s forehead. He could feel himself falling backwards, then quickly falling into unconscious. He collapsed on the floor.

## CHAPTER 2 – MIRROR-MUNCHIES

Harry woke up what felt like days later to him, though it must've been only a few minutes. He shook himself up, and ran over to Hedwig. She looked like she had been mauled by a garbage disposal. Harry picked her up into his arms and put her chest to his ears. She was still breathing, and he could feel her heart beating.

Harry set her down on a bed, and looked through his cauldron for his wand. When he found his wand, he took it out of the cauldron, and pointed it at Hedwig.

“Anicure!” said Harry. Even though he wasn’t allowed to use magic out of school for fun, if a life and death situation arose, it was legal.

A small glowing fish, bird, and dog flew out of Harry’s wand and into Hedwig. She glowed bright yellow for a second, then went back to her normal white. She opened her eyes, and ruffled her feathers. Hedwig then flew back to her cage, and let out a large hoot. As she flew over, Harry looked around his room, and almost screamed when he saw Dudley, just sitting there in a chair in the corner of his room.

“Dudley...” gasped Harry. “What are you doing here?”

“I have something for you,” he said, standing up with his arms behind his back.

“Dudley,” sighed Harry, “I don’t have time for this right now, my owl is hurt and-”

“Here,” said Dudley, extending his arm to Harry. Right on top of his palm, there was a small, brown box. What was he up to? Dudley had never given Harry a real present in his life! Could it really be real?

“Take it,” said Dudley, sensing Harry’s hesitation. Harry was almost afraid to take it, it was probably just another one of his pathetic jokes. “I promise its not a joke, just take it, alright?”

There was something about the way he said it that convinced Harry. With a questioning look on his face, Harry grabbed the small box out of Dudley’s hand, and opened it. Inside, there was the most beautiful watch he had ever seen.

It was made out of some sort of green crystal, it shimmered all over. At the place in the watch where the face would be, there were a tiny snake-head, with two red rubies for the eyes, and its tongue going around as the hand. It was intricately carved all over, to look like not just any snake, but a Basilisk! The king of all snakes!

“Th- thanks, Dudley,” said Harry, having no clue what to think. Throughout his entire life, Dudley had never even said one nice thing to Harry, much less give something to him... voluntarily. Maybe he had turned over a new leaf.

“Happy Birthday!” said Dudley.

“What?” said Harry. “Um... there’s still several weeks until my birthday, Dudley.”

“I know, but since we’re leaving for Hawaii next week, I figured I won’t have time to give it to you on your actual birthday.”

“Where did you find it?” asked Harry, still looking it over and admiring it.

“I found it in the basement,” he said. “It was in a box labeled ‘Lily’”

Harry immediately looked up at him. Lily? Lily Potter? His mother?

“You mean my mom?” asked Harry quietly.

“Yeah,” said Dudley. “I think we got a box of her stuff from her will. Even though my mom hated her, she still couldn’t throw it out.”

Harry looked at Dudley, then at the watch. Somehow, knowing that it had once belonged to his mother made it appear to be even more beautiful.

"But why are you giving this to me?" asked Harry, putting the watch on.

"Come on," said Dudley, smiling and patting Harry's shoulder, "can't a cousin do something nice every now an then, huh?"

"Other cousins, yes I'm sure. You... no way," said Harry. Dudley let out a sigh

"Harry, I haven't told anyone this... no one at all."

"What is it?" asked Harry, interested.

"Well, a little into my school year last year, I started having these dreams," said Dudley. "Only, these weren't dreams of floating in the air, or falling, or whatever. No, these were dreams with a message. They were telling me something."

"What were they telling you?" asked Harry.

"That I should be doing something that I'm not," said Dudley, extremely seriously. "So, I tried everything. I tried losing more weight, but the dreams wouldn't stop; I tried to do better in school, but the dreams wouldn't stop; I even tried having a girlfriend for a while, but that didn't make them stop."

"So, one night, I laid awake in bed, contemplating what I could possibly be doing that I wasn't: being nice to you, treating you like a human being."

"And have the dreams stopped?" asked Harry.

"Ever since I proclaimed to myself that day that I would be nice to you for the rest of our lives... yes. I realized that I should have known to be that way ever since you first came here. Just because you can make glass appear, and talk to snakes doesn't mean you're a bad person... in fact, it makes you kind of cool."

"Um... thanks Dudley," said Harry.

"Hey, you want to come downstairs?" asked Dudley. "You must get awfully bored up here all by yourself."

"Um... sure," said Harry, still overwhelmed by Dudley's sudden and complete change of heart. "Just let me check on Hedwig."

"Alright," said Dudley, smiling as he left the room.

Once Hedwig had been settled back into her cage, Harry sat down on his bed. So many questions were burning in his mind: Why was Dudley being so nice to him? Was it really because of the dream? And before... what was up with the black phoenix in his room? He didn't even know phoenixes came in black! And what had caused his forehead to hurt when he saw it? Harry rubbed his eyes and walked over to the mirror in his room, and lifted up his bangs to reveal a lightning shaped scar on his forehead.

This scar made Harry even more unusual, even by wizard's standards. Harry was the only person to ever survive an encounter with Lord Voldemort, the most powerful and evil wizard in over a century. Voldemort barged into Harry's parent's house one night when Harry was only one year old. Voldemort killed his mom and dad, and when he tried to kill Harry, his curse backfired, turning him into a weak, powerless creature that over a course of thirteen years returned back to his original power with the help of his most faithful servant, Peter Pettigrew or Wormtail. The reason Voldemort's curse had backfired is because his mom, Lily, sacrificed her life for Harry giving him a shield against Voldemort's powers. However, last year, Voldemort used some of Harry's blood to rise again, letting him get passed Harry's shield.

Ever since Harry's first encounter with Voldemort, he has had the lightning shaped scar as a symbol of where the curse hit him. It had hurt other times during the course of his life, but only when Voldemort had been close, or had an extremely evil thought. So, how could his scar have hurt when Voldemort wasn't near? It must have had something to do with the black phoenix that was in Harry's room.

Now that Harry was thinking, what was that phoenix doing in his room? Was it a spy for Voldemort? The only other phoenix Harry knew of was Dumbledore's phoenix, Fawkes. But, Fawkes was red and beautiful and it most certainly didn't cause Harry to faint. This phoenix Harry just saw was black with dark flames all around it, it was like nothing Harry had ever learned or heard about.

Harry suddenly remembered Dudley. He ran downstairs, avoiding the large mass of wrapping paper that was still there. He arrived at the bottom of the stairs, still being slightly cautious: this could be one of Dudley's more elaborate jokes. He still didn't trust him completely.

"What took you?" asked Dudley, holding his hands behind his back like he did when he was hiding the Basilisk watch.

Oh, um... nothing," said Harry. "What'cha got there?"

"This," said Dudley, his eyes twinkling, "is the secret of my success."

"What success?" asked Harry. Dudley looked surprised. He waved his hand all over his body.

"How I lost over five hundred pounds!"

"Oh, that success..."

"Yeah," said Dudley, not shrugging it off anywhere as fast as Harry was. "Anyway, here it is." He showed Harry what he was hiding behind his back. It was some sort of rectangular package... it looked like some sort of video game.

"What is that?" asked Harry skeptically.

"The single greatest thing ever..." said Dudley, "Monty Python and the Holy Grail. The secret to my success..."

"How did that help you?"

"Well," said Dudley, "whenever I got hungry, I just popped this video in, and watched it. Soon, I was far too busy laughing to worry about eating. Not only that, but this video taught me everything I know, like logic. I didn't understand it in school, but after just watching this, I finally comprehended how, if you weigh as much as a duck, then you are a witch."

"Oh really..." said Harry, wondering if Hermione weighed as much as a duck.

"Come on," said Dudley, beckoning Harry to the living room, "let's watch it!"

Harry, having already finished his little amount of summer homework, had nothing better to do. So, he decided to join Dudley in watching his little video. Though, he would have liked to have had some time to ponder and research that black phoenix he saw.

They sat down, and Dudley put the movie on. For the next hour and a half, they bonded like they had never before. Laughing, repeating lines, and making fun of the movie together, it was a truly new experience to Harry, and he liked it.

For the next week, Harry and Dudley watched the movie several times each day, while Uncle Vernon was at work, and Aunt Petunia was away visiting friends or

shopping. Fairly soon, Harry and Dudley were practically acting out each scene together, Harry felt as though he were back at Hogwarts with Ron... only there had he ever had this much fun.

But, once Uncle Vernon or Aunt Petunia popped their horrible heads into the house, Dudley transformed into a slightly less mean version of the way he used to be; he didn't want to look too changed in front of his parents. Apparently, he still thought very highly of them.

Finally, the day came when the Dursleys would leave for Hawaii, and Harry would be sent to Mrs. Figg's house. Either out of a newfound respect for him, or a prolonged fear that he may break the magical rules to get revenge on them (Harry chose the latter) the Dursleys did not drive him to her house, but were allowing them to walk to her house since it was so close.

"There'd better not be anything missing when we get home, boy," said Uncle Vernon to Harry, face to face as he was stepping into his car.

"Of course not Uncle Vernon," said Harry, trying not to laugh. He shot Harry one last dirty look, and then climbed inside his car, and shut the door.

"Goodbye Harry!" yelled Dudley, sticking his head and one arm out of his window As the car was pulling out of the driveway. That was a mistake.

"What did you say?" asked Uncle Vernon, immediately stopping the car. Harry saw Dudley go red, recognizing what he did.

"I... um... said goodbye to Harry," said Dudley nervously.

"You do NOT say goodbye to that... thing!" said Aunt Petunia.

"Oh come off it mom!" said Dudley. There were expressions of shock on Aunt Petunia, Uncle Vernon, and even Harry's face. Dudley never spoke like that to his parents.

"Dudley... I..."

"Mom, why do you insist on treating Harry like that?" asked Dudley, appearing to look more confident while speaking freely now. "He's just as much a part of this family as I am and yet you keep treating him like he's some sort of diseased alien!"

"Dudley!" yelled Aunt Petunia. "He is NOTHING like us! He does the... magic thing! He's.. different!"

"Didn't you learn that we should accept other's differences in Elementary School, mom?" said Dudley. "Trust me, I've been spending the last week with Harry, and let me tell you, I wish I'd been spending the last fifteen years like that with him!"

"DUDLEY!" yelled Uncle Vernon. "You've been associating yourself with him!? What is wrong with you!?"

"No, what's wrong with YOU dad?" said Dudley.

"We will discuss this later, Dudley," said Uncle Vernon, immediately turning the car back on, and backing the rest of the way out of the driveway. He evidently wanted to get out of there as fast as possible, before someone heard him say 'magic' or 'wizard'.

"Goodbye Harry!" yelled Dudley from the car as they began speeding down the road. "Please, don't write to me! We've got some pretty big animals at school, and I don't want Hedwig to get hurt! And don't forget! We are the knight who say-" His last word was cut off, they were far away now. But, Harry knew he said 'nee'.

Harry stood there for a few seconds, still staring down the road that the Dursleys had driven away on. From that moment on, he knew that things would be completely different between him and Dudley.

Harry suddenly snapped back to reality, and remembered that he had to go to Mrs. Figg's house. He shuddered at the thought: cats everywhere, mess everywhere, old, cranky lady... yuck. The last thing he wanted to do was spend the rest of his summer vacation at her house. Harry stuck his hands into his pockets and began to think... what else could he do?

Then, he felt a piece of parchment in his pocket, and he pulled it out. Harry hit himself on the forehead for not remembering Ron's map. Why spend the rest of summer with Mrs. Figg when he could spend it with Ron?

Harry dashed back up to his room, and got ready to leave. Hedwig was in no condition to travel, she was still recovering from her massacre. That made him think: since the whole Weasley were wizards, and five out of nine of them are fully qualified, they should know more than he does about these things. Maybe they would know something about black phoenixes.

Harry packed up all of his possessions (which did not amount to much) into his cauldron. He swing the cauldron onto his broom, and he put Hedwig in his jacket. Harry walked downstairs, and opened the door. The air was warm, but not humid at all. The sky was a perfect blue, and he was about to spend the rest of his summer with his best friend.

Though, something was still troubling him: then black phoenix. But, he shouldn't let it get to him that much though. Chances are, Hedwig must've met it on one of her trips, and got in a fight. Maybe it came back to get revenge. And the fact that he fainted, maybe it didn't even have to do with his scar at all, maybe he bumped his head on his door (he was getting taller) or, maybe Uncle Vernon hit him, even though they had never physically abused Harry before. All in all, it was not that big of a deal, and Harry shouldn't let it spoil his good time.

Suddenly, as Harry came out of thought, he realized he was already flying in the air. Harry lost his balance for a second at the initial shock, but then, he realized what was going on and got his balance back. Flying came more naturally to Harry than anything else in the magic world, which was probably why he didn't even realize that he was doing it.

Harry took out Ron's map and attempted to decode the horrible handwriting. Ron's house didn't seem too far away from where Harry was, and if he went fast enough, he could make it there within the hour.

Harry flew for what felt like only a few minutes to him since he was enjoying it immensely, it had been the first time he had flown in almost a moth, and it was and even greater feeling than he had remembered. It was no wonder he had that dream of flying, he was craving it so much.

Ron's house was coming into focus, right beneath the clouds Harry was flying through. It was not that hard to miss, it was a massive house that leaned over to one side

so much that you would expect it to fall over in the Muggle world, but in the magical world anything was possible.

Harry zoomed down towards the house faster than he had ever done so before. He had never flown in such an open place as the open sky itself before, so he had never had the opportunity to gain as much speed. As he went closer and closer to the house, the anticipation of meeting Ron rose.

Harry was soon just a few feet from the Weasley's house, he slowed down considerably, and when he was near their door, he came to a complete stop and dismounted. He put his broom over his shoulder, and walked up to the door.

Harry, not being used to wizard doors, looked around for a doorbell. Instead, he found a shiny sphere that was attached to a gold rod coming out of the house right next to the door. Harry put his hand on the sphere, and it turned green. Harry then pushed down on it and when he pushed it all the way down, the entire Weasley house flashed a bright green, the same as the sphere had.

This took Harry by such a surprise that he tripped over his cauldron that was behind him, and landed on one of his books. As he was rubbing his back from the initial pain, the door opened, and Mrs. Weasley appeared in the doorway. She was a plump woman with fiery red hair and a loving personality. As soon as she saw Harry lying on the ground, she cupped her hands over her mouth and ran out to him.

"Oh my goodness! Harry! What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Well... err... uh..." mumbled Harry.

"Oh, say no more! We're happy to have you, you know, and I'm sure Ron will be just delighted to see you. Come in, come in!" she offered Harry her arm, and he grabbed onto it. She helped him up, and they walked into the house. Once they were inside, Harry stood in the middle of the kitchen, looking around for Ron.

"Harry dear, Ron's up in his room. You can put your stuff up there."

Harry nodded, and walked over to the stairs. He had been to Ron's room so many times before, he knew where to go. But, just as he was about to go on the first step, he saw Mrs. Weasley coming down the stairs. She looked at him and her mouth dropped open.

"Harry!" she said, "What- what are you doing here?"

"Uh, you just let me in," replied Harry, slightly confused.

"But I've been her the whole time- oh no..." her face suddenly turned to an look of anger. "Those twins! Arg!" She stomped down the rest of stairs, and Harry moved out of the way. Just as he turned around though, he was face-to-face with another Mrs. Weasley. The Mrs. Weasley that opened his door was right behind that one, each had an expression of surprise and confusion on her face.

Even though oddities were probably common in the world of wizardry, Harry had never experienced anything like this before. Seeing three copies of the same person at the same place and time was very strange. Suddenly, the Mrs. Weasley that Harry met when he turned around, spoke:

"Fred! George! This time you've gone too far!" she said to the two others. Both turned red, and they said the same thing at once:

"What do you mean?!"

"Creating some sort of item that transforms you into someone else! The world just isn't prepared for that sort of thing, and neither is this house!"

"How dare you yell at me! I'm your mother!" yelled the Mrs. Weasley that opened the door.

"Fred, George! Change back right now!" said the Mrs. Weasley that Harry had met on the staircase.

"No, you change back!" said the other two.

Harry felt so confused right now, his brain should have exploded a while ago.

"Sorry Fred, sorry George," said the Mrs. Weasley that was on the staircase calmly as she pointed to her eyes. "Your eyes gave it away, your item needs tweaking. I'll never forget that you both are the only ones in the family with blue eyes."

After these words, the other two Mrs. Weasley's took out their wands, and pointed them at themselves.

"Epistrefus!" they both yelled. Their skin suddenly turned into a clear liquid that quickly dripped off, collecting in a small puddle at their feet. When all the liquid had dripped off, Harry recognized what was left as Fred and George Weasley, Ron's older, identical twin brothers.

"I can't believe you would play a trick on Harry! Especially since it's because of him that you even have those things at all!" said the real Mrs. Weasley.

"Yeah, sorry Harry. It was just a perfect opportunity," said Fred.

"We saw you flying in, and we just finished some of them," said George.

"Oh, it's okay," said Harry, "I liked them. What were they anyway?"

Fred and George looked at each other and smiled. They both reached into their pocket, and pulled them inside-out. About fifty, tiny gray spheres fell out, though they stayed suspended in mid-air due to Fred and George's magic.

"They're Mirror Munchies! Only a galleon each, a huge bargain!" said George, smiling. "They transform you into whatever person is closest to you. Best used in crowds."

"They took us forever to get right," said Fred. "Once we tested one on Ginny, and she turned into her toast. Once we got it to only change into people, we tested it on Ron, and every time he got near someone, he turned into that person. Now that was a confusing day."

"Here Harry," said George, offering several Mirror Munchies to Harry. "Take some as a token of our gratitude. If it wasn't for you, we wouldn't have been able to get all the ingredients to make them." Harry took them all and put them into his pocket.

"Oh yeah, and that'd be too bad. It's a real sad world without Fred and George's crazy stuff," said a voice coming down the stairs. Harry turned and saw Ginny Weasley coming down. Harry was amazed at the sight of her. He knew that she had a crush on him, but had never returned those feelings until now.

Ginny must've grown over the summer, she was now just a little shorter than Harry, and her long flaming-red hair went all the way down her back. She walked over to a cabinet, took out a green apple, bit into it, and then walked back upstairs. Harry could still hear her eating, and he kept his eyes on her as long as he could until Fred's voice broke his daze.

"Oh, don't mind her Harry," he said. "She's just upset because she woke up four different days as four different animals. I mean, I can understand not liking being a giraffe, what with your head hitting the ceiling and all, but you'd think she'd like waking

up and seeing a horse or a flamingo face in the mirror, I thought girls liked those sort of things.”

They all laughed, and Harry decided to head up to Ron’s room. He once again grabbed his stuff, and ran up the crooked steps to the very top. He came to a door that had a plaque on it that read: “Ronald’s Room”. Harry knocked, and he heard Ron say, “Come in.” Harry opened the door, and walked through.

Ron was on his bed reading some Quidditch book. When he looked over and saw Harry, his face turned to a smile, and he walked over.

“Well I’m glad I went through all that trouble to make that map now,” said Ron.

“Yeah, thanks”, said Harry as he set his stuff down on the floor. “That saved my life. The Dursleys were leaving for Hawaii, and if I didn’t have your map, I would have had to stay with Mrs. Figg all summer.”

Harry walked over to Ron’s bed to see what he was reading. The book was laying cover-up on top of the covers, it was Quidditch Tips and Tricks. Seeing the look of confusion on Harry’s face, Ron spoke.

“Well, it’s a new year, and since there’s an open spot on the Gryffindor Quidditch team, I guess I might try out.” He shrugged his shoulders, and looked at Harry for his approval. Harry had been the youngest player on a Hogwarts Quidditch team, and his team had only lost one game while he was on it. He was the unspoken champion of Hogwarts Quidditch.

“Sure, you’ll do great Ron,” said Harry who wasn’t absolutely sure if that was true. Ron was an okay player, but Harry never seen him show the level of skill necessary to be on a team. Just then, one of the reasons Harry had come to the Weasley’s, besides to be with Ron, came to his mind: the black phoenix.

“Uh... Ron?” proposed Harry.

“Yeah Harry,” replied Ron, who began looking at his book again.

“Um... well... your dad’s a wizard, and so are three of you brothers and I was just... well... wondering if any of them had ever come across a... black bird before...”

Ron lifted up his head from the book, and raised an eyebrow.

“What kind of ‘black bird’,” he asked.

“More of a... black phoenix,” said Harry.

“A black phoenix? What are you talking about Harry...” then suddenly his face dropped and went white, “did you see something Harry? What was it? Does it have something to do with You-Know-Who?”

Harry didn’t know what to say to this, so he just decided to tell the truth. He told Ron about what he saw when he entered his room, and what it had done to Hedwig. Ron was silent throughout the whole thing until the very end.

“Well, I’ve never heard of such a thing, Harry. But-”, he was cut off by the “dong” of a clock somewhere. Harry knew from previous experience that this was an alarm to signal when someone arrived home.

“Hey! Dad’s home!” said Ron excitedly. “If anyone of us knows anything about it, it’d be him!” Ron jumped up, and burst through the door when Harry stopped him.

“No Ron!” he yelled after him. “I don’t want them to think I’m crazy or anything, seeing a black phoenix, or that I got scared of a bird if it turns out to be nothing!” Ron turned around and looked at him.

"Harry," said Ron, "this is more serious than a bird, an unknown phoenix somehow got into your room, attacked your owl, and put you into a state of unconsciousness! We have to know what it was!" He looked up, and saw the look of pleading on Harry's face. "Fine!" said Ron, changing his mind. "If it makes you feel any better, I'll make up some other story."

"Thanks Ron," said Harry.

They walked downstairs quietly, and when they got to the bottom, Harry and Ron saw Mr. and Mrs. Weasley at the table talking quietly. Harry and Ron came up to them.

"Hey dad," said Ron, "uh... guess what Harry and I think we just saw through my... uh... telescope."

Mr. Weasley looked at Ron suspiciously, stabbed a piece of meat with his fork, put it in his mouth, and started chewing. As he did so, he replied, "What? What did you see?"

"We think we saw a black phoenix," said Ron.

At this reply, Mr. Weasley swallowed his meat quickly and Mrs. Weasley dropped her fork that was almost to her mouth.

"Now, what makes you think that son?" said Mr. Weasley in a loud voice.

"Well um... uh..." mumbled Ron.

"It looked just like a normal Phoenix," said Harry, "only, it had black flames instead of red."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Weasley's eyes fell upon him, and then Mr. Weasley spoke,

"Well then," he said, "if you ever see this 'black phoenix' thing again, um... call me up and I'll have a look, alright?" Harry and Ron nodded, and they sprinted back up the stairs not saying anything until they reached the top.

"What was that about?" Ron asked Harry when they arrived back in his room.

"Well," said Harry, "they either know nothing about it, or they do know something and they don't want to tell us."

"Yeah well, I'll go with the second one," said Ron.

"Me too," said Harry, "but for now, let's not worry about it. Hey, I've got an idea, let's go practice some Quidditch in your yard, ok?"

"Yeah, that sounds good," said Ron. He grabbed his ancient broomstick from the corner of his room and he and Harry set out to play. They were later joined by Fred and George, and had a mini-game: Harry and Fred against Ron and George. Ron must have been practicing over the summer as Harry was having a tough time keeping up with him, even though he was on the superior broom. The game kept progressing for hours until both teams were tied at four-hundred-thirty. Harry, having been putting off catching the Snitch for so long as to prolong the game, decided it was time to stop, and caught it just a few seconds. After a few exclamations of accolade, they all went in.

Just as they got inside the house, Mrs. Weasley had dinner ready, and they sat down at the unusually long Weasley table. The first thing Harry noticed as he sat down was Ginny. She was looking even nicer than usual dressed in light-blue not-formal dress. It made him notice her face even more. She appeared to have an expression on her face that read she both did and didn't want to be seen. Harry guessed she was trying to look nice for him since she liked him, but didn't want to actually say anything. Nevertheless, Harry and all of the Weasleys sat began to eat.

Harry hadn't eaten so well in over two months. Even though Dudley's horrific diet was over, the Dursleys decided to still keep Harry on it while they ate normally. Harry almost jumped in surprise when Mr. Weasley asked him if he wanted seconds.

Despite the wonderful dinner, Harry was feeling quite uncomfortable as Mr. Weasley stared at him for almost the entire time. Harry noticed that Mrs. Weasley was doing the same, and wondered what it was all about. Perhaps they did know something he didn't. Harry ate the rest of his dinner very self-consciously, and when he finished, Ron declared that he had had enough and they both went upstairs, and to bed.

Harry climbed into bed, and he and Ron talked for a while: about Quidditch, Hogwarts, just about everything that came to their minds. After they started running out of ideas, though, both of them slowly slipped into unconsciousness.

Just as Harry was about to fall asleep, he heard a scratch at the window. He sleepily glanced over, and saw nothing there. As he looked away, trying to go back to sleep, he heard it again, louder this time. He sat up in his bed, climbed out, and went to the window. It was raining outside, and Harry could hear the thunder rolling in the distance, getting closer. Harry inspected the area, but saw nothing. He sighed and blamed the wind. Just as Harry was about to go back to his bed, lightning lit up the sky and a face appeared in the window.

## CHAPTER 3 – THE LETTER

Harry jumped back in fear. The lightning made the night sky appear to be day, and the face glowed bright. Just as Harry was about to yell in terror, he quickly gained control of himself, took a closer look at the face. It wasn't a human face, it was an owl!

Harry opened the window and let the owl in. Instead of fluttering about and hooting as Harry expected him to do, it slowly and silently flew in as though it was trying to keep its presence a secret. Harry knew that this owl must have something important to deliver to the Weasleys, so he let the owl perch on his arm, and he walked downstairs to deliver it to them.

The lights coming from downstairs showed that someone was down there and Harry hoped that it was Mr. and Mrs. Weasley so he could give them the owl. As Harry got closer to the door leading to the bottom floor, he heard voices. It was Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, and they were talking.

"I just don't know Arthur," said Mrs. Weasley to her husband, "it just doesn't seem like the kind of thing they'd make up."

"They didn't make it up Molly," replied Mr. Weasley, "The only people that know about black phoenixes are either victims of Voldemort's attacks with them, or members of the Ministry of Magic during that horrible time. So, how could they now about them without seeing one? So, they either did see one today, or..."

"Or? Or what?" she asked.

"Or, Harry saw it and didn't want to tell us directly."

Harry felt his blood go cold and his body stiffen. He suspected him!

"Now Arthur, why would he do a thing like that?"

"Well, why did Harry come here in the first place. I'd bet everything I had on that he came here originally to ask us, then thought about it, and believed he'd sound weak and afraid if he did ask us, so he made up the story about seeing it through the telescope."

"Well," replied Mrs. Weasley, sounding a little angry, "Harry told me the reason he is here is because the Dursleys went on vacation to Hawaii, and he didn't want to stay with the lady that usually watches him."

"Molly, I've worked with Muggles enough to know that they do not take spontaneous trips like that. A trip anywhere, much less Hawaii, would probably take years of planning for them." They both stood there for a minute in silence pondering Mr. Weasley's comment.

"Well, if he did see it," said Mrs. Weasley quietly, "then what should we do about it Arthur?" Mr. Weasley put his hand to his chin, and Harry could tell he was thinking.

"I don't know Molly, I just don't know. Black phoenixes only meant one thing in my day: You-Know-Who. They were his symbol before the Dark Mark was, and they assisted in his destruction wherever he went. If he saw one, either Voldemort is near us, or spying on Harry."

Harry decided this was not the best time to deliver the owl, so he headed back upstairs, all the way thinking about what Mr. and Mrs. Weasley had been talking about. Obviously, they did know something about the black phoenix but were unwilling to tell him. Why? Why did everyone still think he was a baby? Sure, he wasn't a legal adult yet, but still, he had faced Voldemort four times and gotten the best of him at every occasion. Why couldn't people treat him with more respect?

Just then, the owl that had delivered the letter bit Harry's finger, causing him a small amount of pain. Harry shook his finger, and as he did, the letter fell off of the owl's leg. Harry looked down at it, and saw his name written on the front of the small envelope, not Mr. or Mrs. Weasley's. Maybe the letter was for him.

Harry grabbed the letter and the owl, and ran back to Ron's room, careful to be quiet enough to not wake him up. He sat down on his bed, and opened the envelope, taking out the small piece of parchment inside. It read:

Be alone at the front of your Aunt and Uncle's house tonight at midnight.

That was it. There was no signature, no anything that would indicate who sent it. Then, it came to Harry. It must be a letter from Hogwarts telling Harry to go back with his Aunt and Uncle for the rest of the Summer.

Dumbledore told Harry that he had used a very powerful charm on him so that whenever he was near family, Voldemort could not touch him. Now, with Voldemort rising again, Harry assumed that Dumbledore thought that even the Weasleys were not enough protection for him. Dumbledore could find a way to get the Dursley's back and be with him, even all the way from Hawaii.

But then, Harry thought, if it was a letter from Hogwarts, why didn't it have the Hogwarts seal on it, or the professor's signature on it who sent it? Harry guessed that they wanted him back in a big hurry and they didn't have time for anything like that.

Since the letter said to be there alone, Harry didn't wake Ron, but scribbled a note for him telling him that he was being forced to stay with the Dursley's for the rest of the summer. Harry slung his cauldron over his broom (with all his stuff in it), and started on his way downstairs.

Just then, he remembered. Mr. And Mrs. Weasley were down there, and they would probably question him some more about the phoenix, and where he was going. Harry really feel like dealing with that right now, he was very tired. He had to find another way out.

Harry turned around, and saw the window in Ron's room that the owl had come through. Since it took up almost half of the wall, he, along with all his other stuff, could easily fit through it. Harry walked over to the window, and opened it. A brisk summer night's wind blew by him causing his teeth to chatter. Harry threw Hedwig (who was now well enough to fly) out the window, and then he jumped out after him. They both flew as fast as they could all the way back to the place Harry had just tried to get away from.

It was a little after midnight when Harry finally arrived back at the Dursley's house. It took him less time to return than going since he didn't have to decode Ron's map, he just remembered the way to go. Harry dismounted from his broom, and sat down on the stoop in front of the Dursley's house, feeling extremely disappointed and unhappy.

Harry waited for a few minutes, and just when he was about to fall asleep, he heard footsteps coming closer from down the street. Harry stood up, and tried to see who was coming. Was is Dumbledore. Was it Hagrid? Who?

Harry grabbed his stuff, and started walking towards the figure. As he got closer, it came into focus, and as soon as Harry saw who it was, he turned around and walked in the opposite direction, trying to get away from it as fast as possible without being seen.

"Harry? Harry Potter? Is that you?" came the creaky old voice behind him. The voice that belonged to Mrs. Figg, the woman that the Dursley's were originally going to leave Harry with. Harry couldn't try and go the other way now, it was too late, she had spotted him. All he could do now was stand where he was, and wait for her to come over to him. Within seconds, she was right next to him.

"Why, hello Harry!" she said. "Fancy meeting you here at this time!"

"Hello Mrs. Figg," replied Harry with a sigh.

"Oh, why the sigh Harry?," she asked.

"Well, it's just that I was expecting to meet someone and—" She cut him off.

"Well that's very nice Harry," she said. "Why don't you come in for some tea and cookies? You look like you're awfully cold."

It was true. Even though it was a summer evening, Harry was very cold. In fact, the more he thought about it, the colder he got. Also, he thought to himself, Mrs. Figg's house wasn't too far away from where he was supposed to meet whoever was coming, so he could see them through the window, then come back when they arrived.

"Alright," said Harry.

"Excellent," said Mrs. Figg. She led the way to her house which was just as Harry remembered it. It was a perfectly green lawn with pink flamingos placed all over the yard, as if guards for the house.

When Mrs. Figg opened the door, Harry didn't hear something that he had expected to. Mrs. Figg owned many, many cats, as some old women do, and whenever she used to open the door, Harry would hear all of the cats 'meow' in unison as if saying hello to her. This time, however, when she opened the door, there was just silence. Harry guessed she must've put her cats in the basement or something.

They walked through the door, and into the house. Harry sniffed, and for once, could not smell a single cat. He could, however, smell the cookies, that were baking and the tea that was boiling. Before he could ask her what happened to her cats, she asked Harry a question:

"So Harry, how have you been?" she asked nicely. Her voice seemed different. It was not weak and old anymore, but stronger and louder.

"Oh, okay," Harry responded, not daring to tell her anything about the phoenix, Hogwarts, or anything else magical. "Um, Mrs. Figg, may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly Harry," she responded in the same voice.

"Um, what happened to your cats?" Mrs. Figg gave Harry a look he didn't expect, she smiled.

"Well Harry," she said, still smiling, "I had to get rid of them all."

Harry, not understanding how someone could get rid of their only friends and be happy asked, "But why? Why did you get rid of them?"

"Because," she responded, "I got a dog."

Harry, who liked dogs, smiled and followed Mrs. Figg who was leading him into the kitchen. Right in the middle of the kitchen was a black dog whom Harry was positive he'd seen before. Wanting to continue with some conversation, Harry asked her, "What is his name?"

“Well,” replied Mrs. Figg, now with a bigger smile, “I use the name he called himself before, Sirius Black.”

## CHAPTER 4 – AMBUSH AT MRS. FIGG'S

Harry's jaw dropped so far down, he thought it was in danger of hitting the floor. How and why would Sirius, his godfather and a fully trained Animagus (a wizard that could transform into an animal) wizard who was being falsely accused of murder, be here at Mrs. Figg's house? As Harry's mind was racing over this, the dog that was in Mrs. Figg's kitchen transformed into Sirius Black. He ran up to Harry and gave him a hug.

"Harry, Harry! So good to see you! I haven't heard from you lately so I thought it would be best to be here when we-", he stopped suddenly, frowned for a second, then put his smile back on. "Well, I'm just glad to see you."

Harry's brain had finally seemed to consciousness, as he found himself able to speak again.

"What? How? When? Why? Why? Why are you here?" he asked.

"That, Harry, is a question that shall be answered once Remus arrives", responded Mrs. Figg.

"Remus? Oh! Professor Lupin! Is he coming?" asked Harry, quickly. Then, realizing there was bigger question at stake here, "Mrs. Figg... are you a... witch?" asked Harry. Mrs. Figg smiled.

"Yes Harry, I am a witch and a bodyguard," she said. "You see, Harry, Dumbledore put a Kinsafe Charm on you so that whenever you are around your family, your mortal enemy could not come near you. In this case, Voldemort could not touch you."

"Yeah", said Harry, "he told me that."

"Good," she replied, "from your expression at hearing me to be a witch, I am assuming that you did not know that when the Dursley's left somewhere without you, I was expected to take care of you. If Dumbledore couldn't have you around your family, he at least wanted you around a fully trained wizard, in this case: me."

"So you were the one that wanted to meet me, you sent me the owl didn't you?" Harry asked Mrs. Figg. She nodded.

"Well," said Harry, "now that I'm here, what do you want?"

Mrs. Figg and Sirius looked at each other and gave a look of excited sadness.

"Once again Harry," said Sirius, "that is for when Remus arrives."

Harry nodded, anxious to know what this was all about, but trusting them enough to allow them to continue going along in their secretive manner. Just then, an alarm went off, and Harry jumped.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Figg as she ran to her stove. "Well, I suppose Remus won't mind if we start without him." Harry and Sirius nodded in a hungry agreement as they saw and smelled the cookies coming out of the oven.

Despite the excellent food, and the fact that every time on cookie was eaten, two more magically grew in its place, it was a very tense time. They all ate in complete silence, and Harry's anxiousness to know what this meeting was all about was growing. Then, when the plate of cookies was about three times its original size, Harry heard the front door quickly open and close.

"Ah! That must be Remus!" said Mrs. Figg. She tapped her napkin against her lips stood up, and walked back out to the living room. Sirius and Harry did the same. As soon as Mrs. Figg entered the room, Sirius and Harry heard a loud shriek, and they ran in.

As Harry saw what Mrs. Figg had seen, he let out a scream as well. Professor Lupin did arrive, but he had a large snake protruding out of his chest with blood all over it. It was evidently impaled through him as Harry saw a snake tail protruding out of his back. Sirius was the only one who kept his cool, and took out his wand.

"HARRY! RUN!" yelled Sirius, but Harry's feet felt as though they were cemented to the ground. Sirius finally pointed his wand at Professor Lupin, and yelled,

"Magnetus!" an orange beam shot out of his wand, and right into the snake's mouth. The snake screamed and shrieked, but Sirius did not stop.

The snake was turning a bright green, and then suddenly, it exploded. Harry shielded his eyes as what seemed like millions of tiny snakes slithered all over the place. They were attacking Sirius and Mrs. Figg, but they were both out of shock now, and shooting some sort of black ray at them all which made them disappear.

"HARRY! RUN NOW!" yelled Sirius again. This time, Harry did run. He ran to the door, and reached for his broom that was right next to it. As he put his arm out towards the handle, a tiny snake jumped up and bit him in the arm. It was not very painful, but lots of blood was pouring out of Harry's arm where the snake gotten him.

Harry wrapped the fingers of his other hand around the snake, and ripped it off taking a little bit of his flesh with it. Harry threw it back into the sea of the snakes that Mrs. Figg and Sirius were trying to keep back.

Harry grabbed his broom and ran outside. He immediately mounted it, and flew into the sky, not knowing where he was going, just wanting to get away from there. As he flew higher and higher, the sounds coming from Mrs. Figg's house got fainter and fainter until Harry couldn't hear them at all.

Harry flew higher than the clouds, and then zoomed down. As he was flying, his mind flew faster. What had just happened? What was that thing in Professor Lupin? What happened when Sirius used that spell on it? Harry certainly knew a general answer to all of these questions: "Nothing good."

Just then, Harry realized he was back on the ground. He must have flown while he was thinking, lost track of what he was doing... again. He looked around to see where he was, and recognized the area as Diagon Alley, one of the largest wizard-only villages in the world. It was like a wizarding market where anything that you wanted could be found. How did he get there so fast?

Only, Harry had only experienced Diagon Alley in the daytime and crowded with people. As Harry looked around and saw the closed shops and clear streets, another question came across Harry's mind: how did he get to Diagon Alley so fast? It was all the way in London and Mrs. Figg's house is far away from London. Harry must have been a better flier than he thought.

Harry walked around looking for a sign of anyone, anyone at all. Suddenly, he saw a light in a store. It was Vold's Worm's Tails. The name of the store sounded familiar, but Harry's brain felt hazy at the moment, so he couldn't put his finger on it. But, since it was the only store that looked open and inhabited, Harry went up to the door and opened it.

"Hello?" asked Harry. "Is anyone here?"

Just as he put one foot in, he felt something cold touch his face, then curl around over his mouth and pull him back. Harry couldn't breathe, he was being kidnapped!

The kidnapper pulled Harry into a room in the back of the store with his silver arm still around Harry's mouth. Harry was trying to pull it off, but the metallic arm was too strong. As they entered the room, Harry saw a tall red chair turned away from him. The person holding Harry shut the door behind him, and let go of Harry's face. Harry immediately turned around and saw Peter Pettigrew, the man who was the reason he had no parents.

Peter was looking different though. He used to be bald and a little large. Now, he had a full head of hair and large muscles, gifts that Voldemort had evidently given him for being a faithful servant. Peter had a smirk on his face, and he walked backwards toward the door, fading into the shadows.

Harry's attention now turned to the chair. It was the only object in the room so Harry was naturally drawn to it. The chair slowly spun around, and when Harry's scar began to tingle, then sting, then hurt, he knew who was in that chair: Voldemort.

Harry's guess was confirmed when the chair turned all the way around and Harry, once again, came face to face with his enemy. Voldemort, who now looked more like a skeletal snake than a man, stood up, and glided on the air, rather than walked, over to Harry. When he was within a foot of Harry, his pale, snake-like face contorted into what Harry assumed was a smile, though it was hard to tell expression from the small slit in Voldemort's face. He put out a spider-like hand, and caressed Harry's head.

"Harry... Harry Potter.... The boy who caused my downfall, and who caused my rise. You will help me become greater than ever before..." hissed Voldemort.

"Never!" yelled Harry, quite louder than he expected. He grabbed Voldemort's hand, and tossed it off his head. It fell back to Voldemort's side. Voldemort's smile now turned to an expression of disgust, but then into another one of his grotesque smiles.

"Harry, I don't think you understand. You see, you will help me. Now, you can either use this opportunity to your benefit, and join me now, and I will make you more powerful than you could possibly imagine. Or, we could do this the hard way, and I could just wait a while, then kill you. Either way, you will help me in the end."

"Never!" yelled Harry again, not knowing what else to say. Voldemort took away his smile, and glared at Harry.

"Very well then, you have sealed your fate! You will die! And your little friends will pay, especially your Animagus god-father: Sirius!" spat Voldemort. His expression of hatred now turned to a small smile. "Wormtail and I have become better friends, Harry. We both share the same enemies and allies. If Wormtail desires Sirius dead, then that is what will happen. If I desire you to be dead, then that is what will happen. Lord Voldemort always rewards his faithful, as long as they help him..."

"No way! Even if you kill me, there's no way you can get to Sirius or my friends!"

"Oh, yes there is Harry, yes there is! Now, time to go!" Voldemort took out his wand and pointed it at Harry.

"Expelliarmus!" he yelled.

Suddenly, the world around Harry faded to a black, then it quickly transformed into Mrs. Figg's house. She, Sirius, and Remus were each looking at him from above while he laid on the ground.

## CHAPTER 5 – THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

“What happened?” asked Harry groggily as he rubbed his eyes. Suddenly he remembered Voldemort and Wormtail and he sprang to his feet. “Where are they!? Where are they!?” he cried.

“Harry it’s okay!” said Mrs. Figg. “The snakes are gone now.” She walked over to him and waved her arm in the direction of a chair. It immediately popped up behind Harry, and he sat down in it.

Obviously they didn’t know who Harry was referring to. He had completely forgotten about the snakes, and the ambush that had occurred. He was trying to ask where Voldemort and Wormtail were, but Sirius interrupted.

“A baby Hallython bit you, Harry, and caused you to hallucinate,” said Sirius. “I forgot that baby Hallythons are stored inside the mother, so when I used the magnet spell, I accidentally pulled them out.” Sirius looked very depressed, he must have felt as though the ambush was all his fault. Just then, Harry felt a iciness on his arm where the Hallython bit him. He looked over and saw Professor Lupin rubbing his wand over Harry’s snake bite wound. The cut slashed blue for a second, and then it just disappeared.

“He’s all fixed up Sirius,” said Professor Lupin. “You don’t need to worry,”

“We were all concerned when you started moving all over the place,” said Mrs. Figg quietly. “The Hallython must’ve caused you to hallucinate, but Sirius thought something had possessed you. Never seen him so worried in his life.”

“What did you see Harry?” asked Sirius.

Harry, who didn’t want Sirius to worry about getting caught because of a dream he had about Voldemort, said, “I don’t remember.” Harry still wanted to know why he was called here, and he didn’t want that cut short because of a silly hallucination.

Suddenly, another blue flash appeared next to Harry, and he looked over. Professor Lupin was rubbing his wand on the place where the snake impaled him, and it apparently took more magic to heal than Harry’s wound because of the brighter flash. There was a scar there for only a second, but that disappeared almost instantly.

“Professor Lupin-,” began Harry before he was cut off.

“Remus Harry, just Remus,” he said. “I’m not your teacher anymore, and I think we are familiar enough to be on a first name basis.”

“Okay, uh... Remus. Why were you attacked by that Hallython?” asked Harry. From the look on his face, this was apparently something Lupin didn’t really want to tell him, but he sighed, and spoke:

“Well Harry, I got a letter from Arabella (he pointed to Mrs. Figg) and she said the Dursleys had left you home alone. I didn’t bother to read the rest that said you were with the Weasleys and you’d come to her. I immediately came to the Dursley’s house and barged in while someone else was in there.”

“Who was there?” asked Harry.

“Peter Pettigrew, or as he is known now, Wormtail,” shuddered Lupin. “He shot the Hallython at me, but not before I hit him with a Stupefy. It prevented him from kidnapping me, but not from apparating away. I immediately came over here and...”

well... you know the rest." Harry waiting a few seconds to take all this in, then he responded.

"But, how did Wormtail know I was there, and how did he know I would've been home alone?" There was a few seconds of silence.

"That, Harry, is still a mystery," said Lupin. No one spoke for about a minute, until Harry once again broke the silence.

"Anyway, why am I here?" he asked.

"Well, it's a good thing you're sitting Harry because if you weren't I'd ask you to. This is a long story," said Mrs. Figg.

"Well, I've only got another month left until I got to go back to Hogwarts, so don't make it that long," replied Harry. Everyone forced a laugh. Mrs. Figg spoke again.

"Harry, the reason you're here begins before even Hogwarts was founded, before even Godric Gryffindor was born, well over 2,000 years ago. It is a story that has been passed down from each generation to the next." Harry was listening with intent, Sirius and Lupin were half listening, they both were looking tired, they must have heard this before.

"It started with a man named Garde Delafer. In his time, phoenixes were hunted, both for sport and for their healing powers. While a phoenix's tears are powerful healers, the actual phoenix, when put into a potion, is millions of time more powerful than its tears. Because of the intense hunting of them, the phoenixes were slowly but surely going from rare and endangered to extinct.

"Only one man, Garde, cared about the phoenixes for other reasons than their bodies for potions. He felt it was important for future generations to experience the beauty of a phoenix. He believed there was nothing on this earth that could compare with the splendor of a phoenix. So, to help them, he joined a group that hunted phoenixes for sport. This way, he would know where and when to find and save them.

"One day, a giant phoenix hunting expedition was planned, and it was a massive one, bigger than any other before. The hunting group had discovered an enormous pack of phoenixes that had eluded them ever since the group was founded. There were over one hundred phoenixes in that pack, and if the group managed to kill them all, they would make more money than any of them could possibly imagine, the phoenix species would be extinct, and Garde's dream would be over.

"Well, the group did succeed in planning and developing the expedition strategy and Garde had to find some way to stop it. He first tried to sink the ship (brooms that could travel distances that far were not invented yet) that was taking them all there by putting a small hole in the bottom of the ship. It was too small to be noticed easily, but large enough to left a good deal of water in.

"Unfortunately, the room that Garde put the hole in was converted into a cargo hold and a large box covered the hole he made, making it useless. Not a drop of water got inside the ship. But, Garde did not give up, he had another plan. When the ship landed and set up camp, the other men partied, anticipating the large sum of money they would receive when they sold the phoenixes: just one was worth a thousand times its weight in galleons.

"While they were feasting and partying, Garde snuck into their leader's tent and stole the maps that showed where the phoenixes were. He magicked the maps so that they

were inaccurate, and his plan would be that the men would wander aimlessly, unable to find the phoenixes, until they decided to return home.

"It seemed like a good plan, but the next morning, when they set out, all of them men were terribly drunk. They tried to follow the inaccurate maps, but they instead went the correct path, and found the cave where the phoenixes were. However, all was not lost.

"Garde had one last plan, a suicidal plan. He would make the cave fall in, and they would all be crushed, but the phoenixes, who dwelt far back into the cave, would be saved. That day, they all went into the cavern, drunk as ever, trying to find their way to the pack. As soon as one of the men blurted out that he saw a dim flame up ahead, all of them started to run towards it, while Garde used a Siragus Spell on the ceiling.

"It was chaos, rocks were falling everywhere, men were yelling, blood was spraying, and all the while, Garde was trying to get passed the group to the phoenixes, just to try and see a real one in the wild: not the skin of one, or one from a zoo. Just as it appeared that he got passed the falling rocks, he stopped for a second and rested. But, the leader of the phoenix hunting group saw Garde use the Siragus Spell and with his last bit of energy, he threw a giant rock at Garde, and died. The rock knocked Garde unconscious, and the smaller rocks from the ceiling started to fall on him, practically crushing him to death.

"Just when it seemed as though Garde was about to die, he heard beautiful music playing; it was as though there were one hundred wonderful symphonies playing at once. Garde looked up, and saw all of the phoenixes flying toward him. The one that was in front of the rest, however, was a golden color, and it was at least three times as large as the others. It came up to Garde, bent its head over him, and let a single giant tear roll down its cheek onto Garde. The second it touched him, he felt reborn, and gained the strength of fifty men. He easily lifted the rocks off himself, and stood up, in awe of the creature that was before him.

'Man,' spoke the golden phoenix, 'you risked your own life to spare ours, why?'

'Because, I want other generations to experience your beauty,' he responded.

'You speak with the wisdom of many years,' said the Phoenix, 'even though you are so young. Since you sacrificed yourself for us, we are in your debt. Tell us one thing you desire.' All of the phoenixes were still and the only movement was their flames flowing.

'All I want is for my children, their children, and their children to know and love your splendor,' spoke Garde.

'Very well then,' said the golden phoenix, 'to let them experience it better, we will give each member of your bloodline an Order. This Order will allow that person to heal one other of anything, even death if it is necessary, and enough magic is used. However, each person in your bloodline shall only get one Order as we are unable to go all over the world healing people every second. Mankind would get suspicious, and we want to keep our location secret.'

'Thank you,' said Garde. 'I did not expect such kindness.'

'Nor us from you,' it responded.

"And that's how the story goes, Harry. Each person in Garde's family has had an Order, and thus was established the Order of the Phoenix; all the people in Garde's family are in it. Now, however, Garde's family is so far spread all over the world, you can't tell who is part of the Order and who's not. Anyone you meet could possibly be part

of it. You've already met four of them, Harry." Harry, who had been silent the whole time, now spoke.

"Who? I don't know anyone," he said.

"Yes you do," she said, "they're in this room right now." Harry looked around the room. Sirius, Lupin, and Mrs. Figg were all members of the Order of the Phoenix?

"You mean, you three are part of this Order?" he asked.

"Yes Harry, all of us... and you," said Sirius half-asleep.

"ME!" said Harry. "No way, I would have known before!"

"How would you, you didn't even know about the Order until just a few minutes ago," said Sirius.

"Actually Harry," said Lupin, "none of us even knew you were until recently."

"How did you find out?" asked Harry.

"Well Harry," said Lupin, "I was down in Diagon Alley one day when I came to a pawn shop. I looked around and something caught my eye. It was your mom's old schoolbook." Lupin sat up off the chair, reached into his pocket, and took out a small old tattered book. He opened to a page with lots of tiny writing in it, and showed it to Harry.

"It's your mom's family tree, Harry. She researched her genealogy all the way back to Garde. As soon as I saw this, I told Arabella and Sirius, and they decided on this meeting."

"But," said Harry whose mind was now filled and buzzing with information, "if you are part of the Order of the Phoenix, and I am too, then we're relatives! Why couldn't I have stayed with you instead of the Dursleys?"

"Because," said Sirius, "the Dursley's are much closer as relatives to you than any of us and the closer the family, the stronger the shield is."

But Harry hadn't finished with his questions yet.

"Hey, if my mom was part of the Order of the Phoenix, then why didn't she use it to save herself or my dad after Voldemort killed them?"

"Because there was another part to Garde's deal with the phoenix, Harry," said Mrs. Figg quietly and seriously. "The person could not have been, is, or would be evil."

"But my mom wasn't evil!" yelled Harry quite loudly. Sirius, Lupin, and Arabella looked at each other with cheerless faces.

"I guess that no one ever told you your mom's history Harry," said Mrs. Figg, "it's not as pretty as Garde's or your dad's, but you have to know it to understand what's going on."

"I want to know," said Harry.

"Alright Harry," said Mrs. Figg. "I guess it starts over twenty years ago, when your mom was eleven years old and Voldemort was gaining power. No one really knows why, but when your mom was still quite young, he went to her house, changed into one of her friends, and went inside. After discussing several and irrelevant child topic with Lily in front of her parents, Voldemort and her went back to her room..

"He knew that your mom was obsessed with magic. She had acquired a Standard Book of Spells for Seventh Years from an unknown person even earlier in her life, and she did not let her parents know about it. So, before Lily got her letter of acceptance to Hogwarts, he told her some false story that she wouldn't be allowed in unless she did what he told her to do..

“She accepted before she even knew what the catch was. After she accepted, he told her. There was a man starting at Hogwarts: James Potter. Voldemort ordered Lily to befriend him, marry him, have a child, then give it to Voldemort. In return, Voldemort would ensure her arrival at Hogwarts. From that point on she became a Death Eater.

“At first, all went according to plan. She did befriend James, and did marry him. However, after a while of being with him, Lily decided she liked her life with James, and did not want to give their son to Voldemort. By the time they had a son though, it was too late.

“Voldemort came that night for you, Harry, and when he was not given you immediately, he attacked and killed James and Lily, and tried to kill you.”

“But, Mrs. Figg-” Harry was cut off.

“Harry please, Arabella,” she said.

“Alright… Arabella, I still don’t understand, what this has to do with me. I mean, it’s nice to know that I’m part of this Order, and my mom’s history, but what do you need me for?” Lupin reached into his other pocket, and took out a newspaper. He unfolded it, and showed Harry the front page. It read:

### Body of Lily Potter Found!

After years of searching, the body of Lily Potter has been found. As you know, Lily was James Potter’s wife, and died saving her son, Harry’s, life. Ever since that infamous night, when she and James were killed, there have been extensive searches for their bodies so that a memorial may be erected. A week after the attack, James’ body was found. Only a few ashes were discovered, but due to some special searching charms, they proved that that was all that was left of him. Lily’s remains were not that easy to find. Two years after the slaughter, all searches were discontinued due to lack of success, and the memorial was erected without any part of Lily Potter, until now. Yesterday, three young students were practicing Quidditch in Godric’s hollow (where Lily and James lived). After a crazy Bludger knocked one player off his broom, his fall was broken by a hard white stone. After a bit more inspection, that white stone was revealed as Lily Potter’s skull, with the rest of her skeleton under the ground. Strangely enough, the skeleton was over five miles away from the Potter’s house. Inspection of this phenomenon is still going on, though inspectors assume that You-Know-Who did not stop at merely killing the couple, but blowing them into the air,

“So you brought me here to tell me that there’s a monument for my parents?” asked Harry, feeling extremely confused.

“NO!” all three yelled at once.

“Harry!? Can’t you put two things together!?” said Sirius.

“What? What am I missing?”

“Harry!” yelled Sirius. “You can bring your mom back to life!”

## CHAPTER 6 – BLACK PHOENIXES

“Wha- wha- what?” stuttered Harry. He was at a loss for words. He could bring his mom back to life? Was this just another dream of hallucination?

“Yes Harry, that’s correct. You have to power to do that. That is, if you want to use your Order on her,” said Arabella.

“Of course I do!” yelled Harry. “All my life, I’ve wanted nothing more than to be with my parents. But, Dumbledore told me no spell could bring back the dead, was he wrong?” Mrs. Figg, Professor Lupin, and Sirius all looked at each other. Sirius spoke:

“He said that did he?” said Sirius. “Well, Harry, he was not entirely wrong. This is not a spell, potion, charm, or anything. It is an Order. It does not fit into any of those categories. So he is correct in saying that no spell could bring back the dead. Also, bringing people back to life is illegal.”

“Illegal? Why?” asked Harry.

“Because if someone were to discover how to do it, the wizarding world would be overpopulated, for one. Also, Dark Wizards would be practically invincible: they could revive each other all the time. All of this would reign unless every time a way was discovered, it was immediately shunned out and destroyed. Dumbledore was right to tell you that, Harry. He didn’t want you chasing off and trying to find a way to bring Cedric back to life. You would’ve felt more guilty about his death when you would not be able to find a way to bring him back.”

“Okay, I see,” said Harry. He still remembered last year when he asked Cedric Diggory to touch a trophy with him that transported them both to Voldemort. Harry had survived the encounter, but Cedric did not. Harry felt it was his fault for his death since he asked Cedric to touch the trophy with him.

“But,” asked Harry, “why can’t one of you revive my mom instead? Why do I have to do it?”

“Well, there are two reasons for that Harry,” said Lupin with a trace of sadness in his voice. “First, each of us has already used our Order.”

“What? You used them already!?” said Harry.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Figg, “we all wasted them, that is, except for Sirius. I, for example, used my Order on a baby rabbit that I had as a child. It was not even close to death yet, it just looked sick to me because some food was stuck in his fur.”

“And I,” said Lupin, “Also wasted mine. Back in my sixth year of Hogwarts, we had a school dance to celebrate the House Cup winner. My girlfriend, however, was sick that night and would’ve been unable to attend the dance. Not wanting to look like a fool in front of everyone, I use my Order on her so she could attend. Idiotic and head strung. Thank goodness Sirius wasn’t the same, if he had, I wouldn’t be here right now.”

“Yes,” said Sirius, “you remember those Hallythons Harry? Well, the babies just inject their victims with hallucinogens, but a mother injects you with poison. Lupin was about to die when I used my Order on him. After I used my Order, all that was left on him was that small cut that he healed himself.”

“And I am forever in your debt for doing so Sirius,” said Lupin.

“The other reason we would not be able to raise you mom, Harry,” said Arabella,

"even if we did have our Orders is because an Order is strongest when used on a direct member of the family. While your mother is related to the rest of us, it is too distant to do her much good. She has been dead for a while, and it will take quite a bit of magic to bring her back."

"We need at least three phoenixes and it should be performed on her birthday, the day when the most magic will be with her," said Lupin.

"Well, Harry can call upon one, and we can 'borrow' Fawkes from Dumbledore, so that means we only need one more," said Sirius. Just then, Harry blurted out something:

"I saw a black phoenix the other day, maybe you can use that," said Harry.

"What did you say?" asked Arabella. Harry swallowed hard. He just remembered that the fact that he saw the black phoenix was not a good thing.

"The other day, I saw a black phoenix in my room attacking Hedwig," said Harry slowly and gloomily. Sirius, Lupin, and Arabella each looked at him as though he was Voldemort himself.

"Harry," gulped Sirius, "that's not a good thing that you saw that..."

"Why? What is the black phoenix? I know it has something to do with Voldemort, but what else?"

"Well Harry, you remember that story I told you about Garde?" asked Arabella.

"Yes, why?"

"Well, that man who was the leader of the phoenix-hunting group started his own Order of the Phoenix, only it wasn't an order, it was The Chaos of the Phoenix."

"But, you said he died! How could he have his own group?" asked Harry.

"Yes, Harry, but you've been to Hogwarts, so you know all about ghosts. Ghosts are people who have died, but still have enemies that they wish a vengeance upon. This is what happened to Veldomert."

"Voldemort? He was alive back then?" asked Harry.

"No, no, not Voldemort, Veldomert," said Arabella, "they are two totally different people. Where do you think Tom Riddle got his name from? Voldemort wasn't an original name, just a slightly different version of another."

"Alright, I get it," said Harry. Arabella must've been older than he though since she knew Voldemort when he used to go by Tom Riddle.

"Anyway," continued Arabella, "Veldomert started his Chaos of the Phoenix. He returned as a ghost and went back to his castle. There, he had a collection of phoenix skeletons. You see, the skeleton of a phoenix are not necessary for a healing potion, just the rest of the body. He conjured up a potion that brought the phoenix skeletons to life, though not back to their full life, a half-life, much like the kind of life that one would receive after drinking unicorn blood. They were a new type of phoenix, black and dark and more powerful than the normal red ones. Veldomert used these dark phoenixes to fight the Order of the Phoenix and used them to try and destroy Garde and his family.

"But, even a ghost is not immortal, Harry, and he was killed. However, his black phoenixes were not. They remained in his dark castle, waiting for someone to make use of them. Voldemort was that person, he used them as his weapons, and they became his temporary symbol. He sent them into houses, and just one could take out an entire family. It was horrible."

"So then why did he stop using them, if they were so powerful?" asked Harry.

"He didn't," said Arabella. "He continued to use them until they all died, or at least we thought they all died. Evidently, he either hid some somewhere, or some escaped from his clutches."

"And since you saw a black phoenix, Harry," said Sirius, "that means that either Voldemort or his minions are here somewhere, and they are keeping a close eye on us."

"But why would they care about me?" asked Harry.

"For the same reason we want you," said Arabella. Harry twisted his face into an expression of confusion. "Just as a pure phoenix can bring your mom back to a full life, a dark phoenix can bring her to a half-life, an existence of evil. Since your mom was such an amazing witch, they want her on their side."

"Who wants her on their side?" asked Harry.

"Voldemort," said Arabella. Harry quickly sat up, and spoke:

"Well then what are we waiting for?" asked Harry. "Let's get to her before Voldemort can!"

"Harry, Harry, sit down!" said Arabella. "We've already got your mom's body secure. It's out of the memorial and in a safe and hidden place."

"Well then why don't we just do the ceremony now?!" asked Harry.

"We already told you why," said Lupin. "We need two more phoenixes, and we have to do it on her birthday, the day when the most magic will be with her." Harry sat down again.

"Right, I forgot. Sorry, just getting a little excited I guess," he said. All four of them sat there for a few seconds when Harry heard a 'dong' sound. It was Mrs. Figg's clock. It was past five in the morning, and the sun was just beginning to peak over the horizon line.

"Oh my goodness!" said Arabella. "It's incredibly late! Harry, even though you've had a tough past few hours, I think you should get some rest."

"Yeah, I think you're right," said Harry. "Good night everyone." He sat up, waved to everyone, went upstairs, and fell asleep before his new information-filled head even hit the pillow.

"Harry..." said a voice from far away. Harry responded with an 'ugh'. He pulled his covers all the way over his head. The voice sounded like Aunt Petunia's. So, he was out of his dream and back at the Dursley's house. All that he remembered about some Order of a Phoenix, and a Veldomert wasn't true. He was still at the Dursleys for the next month.

Despite this, Harry sat up, groped around for his glasses and put them on. As the room around him came into focus, he saw he was surrounded by things he'd never seen in his room before, things that belong to Mrs. Figg... that meant he wasn't dreaming after all! He really had been at Mrs. Figg's house for the past few weeks, learning about his past.

Harry quickly pulled on some clothes, and ran downstairs to meet Sirius reading a newspaper, and Arabella cooking in the kitchen. Lupin must've not woken up yet.

"Oh, good old Nicholas Flamel finally kicked the bucket," said Sirius, reading the paper. "His god of gold juice finally ran out I guess."

“God of gold?” asked Harry. “What’s that?”

“Oh, that’s just a different name for the Sorcerer’s Stone,” said Sirius. “And the god of gold juice is the elixir of life that it produces.... Ah! The Ministry of Magic’s been screwing everything up again as usual!”

“What now?” asked Arabella.

“They still refuse to acknowledge the fact that Voldemort has returned,” he said, looking quite upset. “In every story here, where his presence is clear, they are still covering it up! Those idiots, they’re just too afraid to accept the truth.”

“Come on Harry, breakfast is ready,” said Arabella. Now that Harry listened closely, her voice did sound like Aunt Petunia’s. Harry smiled at this, and sat down at the table. After few minutes of eating, he heard the door open and close. Lupin appeared in the kitchen seconds later dressed in wizard’s robes. He had a small letter in his hand.

“Oh! That reminds me,” said Harry seeing the letter, “I have to send a letter to Ron and Hermione telling them all about this! The Order, Veldomert, my mom, and everything else!” He sat up, and started running back upstairs to get a piece of parchment and Hedwig.

“Oh no you don’t!” yelled Lupin, Sirius, and Arabella at once. Harry turned around and stared at them.

“Uh, why?” asked Harry.

“I thought we went over this Harry,” said Sirius. “The Order of the Phoenix has been kept a secret for centuries. We’re not going to let you start talking about it now!”

“But, they’re my best friends!” said Harry.

“Harry,” said Lupin, “at school, James was my best friend, but I kept my loyalty to the Order and never told him. Even Lily, his wife, didn’t tell him. Do you understand Harry? You mustn’t tell anyone! Not even...” Harry could tell Lupin was searching his brain for someone Harry respected, “not even... Dumbledore!”

“What!” yelled Harry, confused. “Dumbledore doesn’t know about the Order of the Phoenix?”

“Of course not Harry!” said Arabella. “Only those within the Order know about it, and as far as we know, Dumbledore is not in it.”

“Alright, alright,” said Harry, “I won’t tell them.” He walked back to his seat looking depressed, but the rest were looking happy. This would be the first time he would have ever kept something from Ron and Hermione. They had always helped him with his secrets, his problems, and he trusted them. Could he really keep this from them for the rest of his life?

“Anyway Harry,” said Lupin, “I have here a list of supplies for your next year at Hogwarts. It’s about time to get your supplies for next year since you start tomorrow.” Harry nodded in agreement. The last thing he wanted to do was be at school tomorrow without everything he needed..

“Since Arabella and I have things to prepare, Sirius will accompany you,” said Lupin. Harry’s depressed face turned into an excited smile.

“You mean Sirius is free? He’s not being prosecuted anymore?!” said Harry loudly. Sirius had been on the run from the rest of the wizarding world ever since he was falsely accused of murdering Wormtail.

Sirius smiled.

“No Harry,” he laughed. “I will transform into the dog and go with you.”

“Oh, okay,” said Harry. For a second he thought everything would be okay with Sirius, but then he remembered that nothing could ever be okay in his life, something always had to go wrong.

“Well, what are we waiting for?” asked Arabella. “We’ve all got things to do so let’s get going!” She waved her wand, and the mess of breakfast things on the table immediately disappeared.

“Right, I got some Floo Powder Harry so let’s go Harry,” said Sirius. Harry knew that Floo Powder was a way of traveling from one wizard fireplace to another. Since Harry couldn’t Apparate (disappear in one place, and reappear in another) yet, Floo Powder was the fastest way to get somewhere.

He and Sirius walked over to Arabella’s fireplace in her living room. Sirius reached into his pocket, and took out some green powder. He threw it into the hearth of the fireplace, and some green flames magically came up. Sirius transformed into his black dog, and barked what must’ve been ‘Diagon Alley’ because the next second, the fire flashed blue, and he walked into the flames and disappeared.

Harry walked over in front of the fireplace.

“Diagon Alley!” he spoke. The fire turned blue again, and Harry stepped through it. The world spun around several times, and then he appeared in Diagon Alley with Sirius next to him.

Diagon Alley was now as Harry remembered it: buzzing with people, shops, and money. It was nothing like in his hallucination. Harry then remembered why he and Sirius were here and he took out the letter of his supplies from his pocket that Lupin gave him. Harry opened the envelope. The letter read:

#### Fifth-Year Students Will Require:

The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 5  
By Miranda Goshawk

All You’d Ever Want To Know About Dragons, And More  
By Charlie Weasley

Advanced Prediction  
By Eyesee Yoopi

Shields Against Darkness  
By Gulden Armur

Morphing and More  
By Polly Morfi

Growing Success, A Book On Higher Plants  
By Tulep Grolots

Brewing Masterpieces, A Potions Guide to the O.W.L.s  
By Lekwid Van Brewtoven

Magic History: Creation to the Now  
By Verri Olde

Harry re-read it, just to be sure, then he spoke to Sirius quietly:

“Hey! Charlie wrote a book!” Charlie was the second-oldest boy in the Weasley family. Harry knew he dealt with dragons for a living, but he never knew he was writing a book. This also meant that Harry was going to be looking at dragons this year. Hagrid, their care of magical creatures teacher, loved dragons so Harry knew it was going to be a great class this year.

However, with reading that letter again, Harry saw the book about the O.W.L.s. All fifth-year Hogwarts students took massive exams at the end of the year called O.W.L.s (Ordinary Wizarding Levels). They determined whether or not you passed that year, and it contributed to you becoming either Head Boy or Girl for the seventh year.

Just as Harry was thinking about what next year would hold, there was a scream. Harry looked to his left and saw a witch that was just a little older than him pointing right at Sirius and screaming.

Suddenly, the rest of the people looked at Sirius and started yelling as well. Some started shooting different colored rays at him.

Harry started to panic. What was going on? Sirius panicked and began barging through the crowd, and Harry was following him. Every time they passed someone, that person started yelling or running after them. What was happening? Could they somehow see through his transformation?

Just as Harry thought he was through the crowd, a wall of seven identical wizards dressed in yellow and blue robes appeared in front of them. They squatted down in unison, took out their wands, and then they each shot out a red beam at Sirius at the same time.

Harry jumped out of the way a second too late, two of the beams hit him, and he froze in the exact position he was in. The seven wizards put their wands away, and then three of them walked over to Sirius. One of the three wizards pointed his wand right in front of Sirius and a hole appeared in the air.

They pushed the frozen Sirius into the hole, and he disappeared. After, six of the wizards dissapparated and only one was left. The one that was left cam over to Harry and put his harm on Harry’s shoulder. Harry was shocked and amazed. He was at a loss for words. What had just happened?

“You okay Harry?” the wizard asked him. His voice was very strong and deep. But, how did he know his name? Then Harry remembered his scar, everyone in the wizarding world knew who he was because of it.

“Uh, yeah... I guess so....” said Harry. “But, what happened? What did you do?”

“Harry, you won’t believe this,” he smiled, and took his hand off his shoulder, “we just caught Sirius Black.”

## CHAPTER 7 – NABAKZA

“What!?” yelled Harry, “How did you know that was him?”

“Huh?” asked the wizard. “What do you mean? That was Sirius Black in the flesh that we just arrested.” Harry’s brain was now pulsing, he could feel the blood beating to it.

“You mean he didn’t look like a dog?” asked Harry calmly. He didn’t want to sound too suspicious.

“Uh, no. He looked very human to me,” responded the wizard questioningly. “Harry, are you feeling okay?”

“Yeah, yes I am. I’m okay,” said Harry. How could they have known the dog was Sirius, much less see the actual Sirius while he was transformed? Harry’s mind was hurting from all of these contradictions.

“Alright, well why don’t you come down to Nabakza with me,” he asked nicely. “We have a few questions for you. Okay?” Harry tried to sound very agreeing, he didn’t want to sound like he was guilty.

“Okay, let’s go. But,” thought Harry, “what is Nabakza?”

“You mean you don’t know? Oh, well, it’s understandable, you did live with Muggles for the most of your life. Nabakza is like Azkaban, only not as serious. It is where wizards and witches accused of crimes are put before their trial starts and while it is going on. We don’t want to punish them by forcing them to be with dementors unless they are proven guilty now do we?” he laughed.

“Heh heh, right....” said Harry. “Another question: who are you?” The wizard turned around showing his back to Harry. On the back were five large white letters: ‘AUROR’.

“I’m an Auror, Harry,” he said. “We’re the advanced police of the wizard world. We’re only involved in cases that deal with tracking down and capturing criminals. But, enough questions for now, Harry, we have to head out.” He took out his wand and waved it. Two broomsticks magically appeared.

“Get on one,” said the wizard as he mounted the left one.

Harry got on the other broom, and followed the wizard up after he shot away. This broom was no where near as nice as Harry’s Firebolt. It felt weak and clunky, as though he was flying on an ostrich.

Even with the low-grade brooms, it wasn’t too long before they reached a large building secluded on a grassy mountain. It didn’t look like a prison of any sort, it rather looked like a very tall apartment house. However, when Harry stepped inside, it was definitely not an apartment building. It was a perfectly square, perfectly white room that had black doors on the walls going up all the way to the very high up ceiling.

Harry looked up, and it appeared that they went up out of the sky, as if it went up forever. In front of Harry, though, was a small brown desk with a goblin behind it. He looked busy signing papers. On either side of him were wizards that looked like Aurors, only they were clad in red robes. The wizard that lead Harry here walked up to the desk and Harry followed.

"Mr. Lokup, sir," said the Auror to the goblin, "I have Harry Potter, you requested him for questioning." The goblin looked down at Harry, and squinted.

"Ah yes, Harry," said the goblin. He had a soft and deep voice, "I need to ask you a few-", he was suddenly cut off by the door suddenly opening. Harry looked behind him and saw Lupin and Arabella run in, appearing to be out of breath. Lupin took a second to rest, then walked up to the desk looking very confident.

"Mr. Lokup," he said, "I can assure you, Harry has nothing to do with this." Mr. Lokup took his eyes off of Harry and looked at Lupin.

"Oh really Remus?" he said. "How can I be sure? Sirius is Harry's godfather, was looking for him at Hogwarts, and was with him at Diagon Alley. I see many ways in which Harry is connected with his case."

"Yes, it may seem as though Harry is, but Harry has nothing to do with this. Sirius Black is innocent of the accusations against him. He did not kill Peter Pettigrew. I have heard Sirius' side of the story for two years now, and it is far more convincing than the Muggle witnesses." Lupin waited for a few seconds for Mr. Lookup's response. Mr. Lokup gave Lupin a smile, then spoke:

"So, you admit you have known of the location of Sirius Black, a criminal desperately wanted by the Ministry of Magic and all wizards, and yet you did not turn him in?"

Lupin's face turned white, then it turned green. He obviously did not expect this answer, nor to give away that information.

"Well, yes and no... you see...." stuttered Lupin.

"Yes, I've heard enough. Take him to cell 67A, right next to Sirius Black," Mr. Lokup nodded in the direction of the guard to his left. The guard grabbed Lupin by the arm, and flew up with him. He didn't put up a fight.

"Well Harry," said Mr. Lokup, "I would like to know, do you know and talk to Sirius Black?" He grinned and squinted his eyes at Harry.

"No," Harry lied. "No I do not." Mr. Lokup looked disappointed.

"Away then boy! I don't have all day!" he waved his arm in the direction of the door. Before Harry turned away, he looked up and searched for Lupin. He saw that the guard was pushing Lupin into one of the black doors and Lupin just slid through the blackness as though it were water. Harry guessed that they must be the cells.

Harry then turned around, and walked away. Arabella walked him out, and as soon as the doors shut behind them and they were outside, Harry asked, "How did they know Sirius was there with me Mrs. Fi- err... Arabella?" There was a few seconds of silence before her answer.

"Well, Harry, I don't know," she responded quietly. "There's certainly no way one of them, much less all of the people in Diagon Alley could've seen Sirius . This is troubling me as much as it is troubling you Harry."

"You mean you have no idea how?"

"None at all Harry. All I'm glad about is the fact that we got down here fast enough so that Mr. Lokup couldn't use his spells on you and make you divulge all your secrets."

"What do you mean? And how did you get here so fast?"

"Well, we heard on the WWN (Wizard Wireless Network) that Sirius Black was captured in Diagon Alley, so we assumed they'd be taking him to Nabakza."

“And what about Mr. Lokup’s spells?”

“Well, Mr. Lokup is infamous for getting people to admit their guilt. How do you think he got Lupin to say that he’d known Sirius for two years? Lupin must’ve been so angry from Sirius being caught that he forgot. If I hadn’t been putting a mind barrier jinx on you while he was talking, you would be in a Nabakza cell right now.”

“Thanks Arabella,” said Harry.

“No time for thanks Harry, we both have things to do. Let’s go back to Diagon Alley for you supplies, then go back home. We both have busy days tomorrow: you start school, and I have to go and defend Lupin and Sirius in court.”

“Alright, let’s go,” said Harry. The brooms Harry and the Auror flew on to get here were propped up against the side of the building. He and Arabella each grabbed one, and they flew off. Within a few minutes of speedy flying, Harry was back in Diagon Alley.

All the time Harry was there, he kept a look out for Ron and Hermione.

“They should be here getting their school stuff too,” thought Harry to himself. But, he saw no trace of them the whole time. “They must’ve come earlier.”

Before he knew it, Harry had all his stuff for next year, including a new dress robe, an article of clothing necessary for dances. On the way back to Mrs. Figg’s house, he started thinking again: where is Voldemort now, and does he know he’s here? How did the people in Diagon alley see Sirius? Will Sirius and Lupin win their case? Will his mom be returned to life, and will Harry live with her? Anticipating the new, exciting, and possibly dangerous year that lay ahead of him, Harry bid goodnight to Arabella, collapsed onto his bed, and immediately fell asleep.

## CHAPTER 8 – NEW STUDENTS

To Harry, it felt as though no time had passed at all from when he laid down and fallen asleep to now, with Mrs. Figg's voice in his ears, telling him to wake up. She came in, and Harry looked at her. She looked even more tired than he, she had probably been up all night preparing her case to defend Sirius and Lupin.

"Alright," said Harry, "I'm up." He sat up, and slouched downstairs, still half-asleep. He ate some breakfast, then grabbed his stuff for school. His cauldron was heavier than ever before, he had more and bigger books this year than all his other years. Mrs. Figg was waiting for him at the door when he finally got there after falling twice due to his heavy cauldron.

Harry and Arabella got into her old pink car that was in the driveway. Students didn't usually fly to school because it would be a big risk to have hundreds of brooms flying in the sky at once, all headed toward the same place. However, from his experience with wizard cars, Harry knew there was probably more to Mrs. Figg's car then met the eye.

Harry's suspicions were confirmed when he stepped into her car. It was more of a house than an automobile. There were sinks and beds, table and chairs, curtains on the windows, and even wallpaper. At the front of the 'car' were two large chairs that looked as though they were made out of wood with red cushions. Harry waddled (his cauldron was still weighing him down) over to the one on the left. He opened Hedwig's cage, letting her fly around a bit since she hadn't been out of her cage in a while. Harry looked over and saw Arabella in the chair next to him, she was looking determined as though she knew she had already won the trial. She pulled back on a lever next to her chair, and a voice came from the inside of the car:

"Good morning Arabella, where would you like to go today?" it spoke. It was a sweet and flowing mechanical voice, it was the car.

"King's Cross," she responded. She folded her arms, leaned back in her chair, and closed her eyes. The car suddenly started to back out of the driveway, and it drove forward perfectly as though it was being driven by an expert Muggle.

Harry decided to follow Mrs. Figg's decision, and he leaned back and fell asleep. Just as he felt unconsciousness coming on, the car stopped. Harry sat up, and looked around. They had arrived at King's Cross, the train station that would take him and the rest of the students to Hogwarts. As he stepped out of the car, Arabella stuck her head out of the window.

"I'll see you soon Harry. Good luck this year!"

"Thanks Mrs. Figg," said Harry, wondering when he'd be seeing her. She put her head back in, and drove off, leaving Harry with only Hedwig.

Harry started walking to the platform that would lead him to the train that would take him to Hogwarts. There was something different about this platform though, it wasn't really there. It was between platforms 9 and 10, it was platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ . The first time Harry had to arrive there, he was clueless on how do to do. Now, though, he had done it four times before, so he was quite used to it. You had to walk into a brick wall that separated the two platforms, and unless you were used to doing it, it was quite unnerving.

As Harry was walking toward that wall, he kept an eye out for Ron and Hermione. By the time he had arrived there, there was still no sign of them. Harry shrugged, and ran through the brick wall.

It was as though he just walked through a doorway. All around Harry were wizard students, younger and older than he, each was dressed in their black robes, all of them except for Harry who just realized he was still wearing his normal Muggle clothes.

“Oh well,” thought Harry, “no big deal, I’ll just change on the train.” He walked towards the golden train that just blew its whistle announcing that it would not be waiting much longer.

Harry stepped on the train, and sat down in the nearest compartment. He set all his stuff next to him, and decided to copy Hedwig who was sleeping. Harry leaned back, and closed his eyes, listening to the sound of the train slowly moving.

Just then, the door to Harry’s compartment opened, and a very red-headed, very tall boy stepped in. It was Ron. He was clutching a newspaper in his hand, and he had an exasperated look on his face. He looked at Harry as though he was a ghost. Ron just showed the front of the newspaper to Harry but, Harry could only make out the title: *Sirius Black Is Caught!*”

Ron walked over to the seat opposite Harry, and sat down, still staring at him. Harry was about to say hello to Ron when the door to the compartment opened again. Harry saw a bushy-headed girl step in.

It was Hermione. She, like Ron, had a newspaper in her hand. It was exactly the same as Ron’s. What did they think, he didn’t know? Well, that might be the case, thought Harry to himself, for all they knew, he was at the Dursleys ever since he left Ron’s house and Harry was oblivious to the wizarding world, even the most important events he knew nothing about.

Hermione though, unlike Ron, had a look of sadness on her face. She sat down next to Ron, and they were all silent for a while. Each of them knew and loved Sirius just as much as Harry did. They were among the very few wizards who knew the real story about him, and they felt for him. Hermione opened her mouth, as though ready to say something when, once again, the door to the compartment was opened. This time, however, the visitor was not welcome.

“Hello Harry,” said Draco Malfoy. If Harry ever needed another enemy besides Voldemort, his next choice would be Draco. He and Harry were enemies, like Clark Kent and Lex Luther, like Voldemort and Dumbledore, like King Arthur and the Frenchman. Draco came from a wealthy wizarding family who prided themselves on being ‘pure-blood’ that is, each member of their family had been a wizard, no Muggles. Malfoy’s family were also big supporters of Voldemort, though they escaped the accusations that they were accused of after his downfall.

“Hullo poor-boy, mud-blood,” said Draco, nodding to Ron and Hermione. A mud-blood was a nasty name for a wizard or witch who was from Muggle descent, Hermione, whose parents were both Muggles, was Malfoy’s favorite target for this insult.

“Go away Draco,” said Harry calmly.

“You know, I’d rather not,” he responded. Draco’s two friends, Crabbe and Goyle, appeared behind him. They both looked more like very muscular and stupid apes rather than humans.

“Just heard about your god-father there Harry, dreadfully sorry,” he smiled, though there was a hint of truthfulness in his voice. “He was a great supporter of You-Know-Who, and it’s a pity to lose him. May we have a moment of silence?” He smiled, and he, Crabbe, and Goyle each bowed their heads in unison. They were among the majority of the wizarding world who believed that Sirius Black worked for Voldemort.

“Shut it Malfoy!” yelled Ron who stood up and pointed his wand at Malfoy. He hated being insulted because of his family being poor. Hermione, who was used to such taunts of her being Muggle-born just sat there watching.

“Oh! Standing up for yourself are you now?” smirked Malfoy looking at Ron’s wand. “Just know this Weasley, I know more curses than you have brain cells.” With that, he brandished his wand, ready to fire at Ron, when suddenly, a teacher walked by their compartment. Harry recognized him as the tiny wizard, Professor Flitwick, their Charms teacher and head of the Ravenclaw House.

“Hello boys, oh! And girl,” he smiled spotting Hermione. “Not practicing Defense Against The Dark Arts against each other now, are you?” He smiled, not realizing that they were.

“Oh, no. Not at all professor,” smarmed Malfoy. He hid his wand behind his back.

“Professor,” asked Harry, “why are you on the train? Professors never used to normally ride on it.” Professor Flitwick’s smile faded.

“Oh well, we need to take some… err… extra precautions due to… well… you know….” He walked away and started mumbling incoherently. Harry knew what he was referring to, the fact the Voldemort was back meant more security everywhere. Even if the Ministry of Magic wasn’t doing anything about it, Dumbledore certainly was going to.

“We’ll finish this later Weasley,” said Malfoy. He spun around, and left. Obviously, he didn’t want to fight in front of teachers, lest he get in trouble. The door to their compartment closed by itself.

“What happened Harry?” asked Ron immediately. “I mean, with Sirius and all. The paper says that you were with him.” Hermione nodded, she must’ve wanted to ask the same question. Harry sighed.

“I don’t know Ron,” answered Harry. “One minute, Sirius was there with me as a dog, then the next second people were screaming all around us saying they saw Sirius Black and then some Aurors came down and took him away.”

“How did they know that dog was Sirius?” asked Ron. “Did they know the type of animal he could turn into?”

“I don’t think so,” said Harry. “The Auror who spoke to me said he saw Sirius Black in the flesh. That means they must’ve somehow seen through his transformation.”

“Is that possible?” asked Ron. Both he and Harry looked at Hermione, the smartest of them all. She, however, had her face buried in a book.

“Is it Hermione?” asked Harry, looking curiously at her.

“What?” she looked up from her book and shook her head. “Sorry Harry, what did you say? What was it?”

“Is it possible to ‘see through’ an animal transformation?” repeated Ron.

“No, of course not! That would defeat the purpose of transforming in the first place!” she said as she buried her nose back in the book. Harry’s curiosity came over him:

"Hermione," he asked, "what are you reading?"

"Oh, just looking over the standard spells for this year. Getting ready for our O.W.L.s you know," she smiled and started reading again.

"WHAT!?" yelled Ron, dumbfounded. "Hermione! We don't take our O.W.L.s until the end of summer! We've still got almost ten months!"

"Yes, well, never too soon to start studying," she said, "and the O.W.L.s make up most of our grades, and they determine Head Boys and Girls."

"Speaking of prefects, Hermione," said Ron slyly, "what's that in your pocket?"

Harry noticed it to, there was something shiny and circular popping a little out of her pocket.

"Huh? Oh! That! I totally forgot about that with all that's been going on with Sirius lately," she took the circle out of her pocket and pinned it onto her chest. It was a badge that read: 'Hermione Granger: Gryffindor Prefect'.

"Hermione? You're a prefect?" stuttered Harry. Though, now that he was thinking about it, it shouldn't come as a surprise to him. Hermione had always gotten the best grades of anyway in their grade.

"Well, you should know," she said. "By the way, where's your pin, Harry?"

"What do you mean?" asked Harry. "I'm not a prefect, I didn't get a letter."

"Well, in my letter it says you are one," said Hermione, taking it out from her backpack. "See?"

Harry grabbed the letter from her and read it:

"Slytherin Prefects: Draco Malfoy! What How did he get on that list?"

"Keep going," said Hermione.

"He probably bought good grades," said Harry to himself, "and Pansy Parkinson is the girl prefect. Hufflepuff Prefects: Ernie Macmillon and Hannah Abbot. Ravenclaw Prefects: Paulo Calvacanti and Lisa Turpin. Gryffindor Prefects: Harry Potter and Hermione Granger! Hey! I am a prefect!"

"So then how come you didn't get a letter?" asked Hermione.

"I don't know," said Harry, giving her the letter back.

"Oh, wait, I think I know," said Ron, digging through his backpack. He took out an envelope. "This came for you the day after you left my house."

Harry snatched the letter from Ron, and tore it open. Sure enough, inside, was the prefect letter, and his shiny badge.

"Wow," said Harry to himself. "I'm a prefect..." He threw his Hogwarts robe on over his clothes, and then pinned the badge onto to it. The incredibly shiny badge reflected the sunlight all over the room.

"Great job Harry," said Ron. Harry thanked him, then realized something. Four years ago, he had found a mirror that showed whoever looked in it their deepest desires. In it, Ron had seen himself as Head Boy and captain of the Quidditch team. But, only prefects could become Head Boy or Girl. So, one of Ron's dreams was not going to come true.

Just then, the train stopped, and Harry looked out the window. They had arrived at Hogwarts. Ron and Hermione walked out of the compartment, and Harry ran out after them. As he stepped off the train, he heard a familiar voice:

“Firs’ years! Firs’ years this way!” yelled Hagrid, the very large groundskeeper at Hogwarts. Traditionally, he led the first years at Hogwarts over the lake to the castle in boats while the other students went up a path.

“Hello Hagrid,” said Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

“Hullo Everyone!” he said. “Can’t wait to get started this year! Got some great lessons planned for yeh.” Harry knew Hagrid was looking forward to teaching about dragons, Hagrid had always wanted one for as long as Harry knew him.

He, Ron, and Hermione headed up to the Hogwarts castle while about ten little kids got in small boats and crossed the lake with Hagrid. Harry wouldn’t have minded crossing the lake today, it was bright and sunny, clear and warm. Harry, Ron, and Hermione were the first to reach the gates of the castle, so they threw open the door.

It was just as Harry remembered it. The front entrance was... huge was the only word to describe it. It was fifty times the size of Mrs. Figg’s house, and it had pictures on the walls, ghosts flying, and students walking everywhere. Harry kept walking forward until he came to the Great Hall, the place where the first feast of the school year would take place, and where the new students at Hogwarts would be sorted.

At the beginning of each year at Hogwarts, the new students were sorted into one of four houses: Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, or Slytherin. A student was judged by a hat they placed on their head which house they shared the most common traits with: Gryffindor if they were brave, Ravenclaw if they were clever, Hufflepuff if they were loyal, and Slytherin if they were ambitious and cunning. All were good houses, that is, except for Slytherin. There wasn’t a single witch or wizard that hadn’t gone bad that hadn’t been in Slytherin.

There were four tables in the Great Hall, one for each house. Harry, Ron, and Hermione (who were all in Gryffindor) sat down at the Gryffindor table. Harry spotted the rest of the Weasleys, all of whom were in Gryffindor, and they sat down across from him.

“Harry, meet us on the Quidditch Field after the Sorting. We have to have a team meeting,” said Fred to Harry. Harry nodded in agreement. Harry, Fred, and George were on the Gryffindor Quidditch team, and they hadn’t played as a team for a year now due to the fact that Quidditch was cancelled last year because of the Triwizard Tournament.

Just then, the doors to the Great Hall flew open again and the ten or so students who crossed the lake with Hagrid came through the door. Harry watched them as they walked through the center of the room, and up to the front where there was a three-legged stool with a large and tattered black hat on it.

As Harry watched them go across, he noticed something funny about one of the new students. He didn’t look like a first year at all, he looked as old as Harry. Also, he didn’t look nearly as scared as the other first-years, he in fact looked confident. He wasn’t wearing black robes either, he was instead wearing a long, black flowing coat. He was also wearing white gloves that seemed to dissolve into his skin rather than have cuffs. His wand wasn’t in his pocket or his hands either: it was slung over his shoulder. On his back, there was a sheath for it, and a long string that went over his shoulder, over his chest, and then connected to the bottom of his sheath. Inside the sheath there was a long sword that had a beautiful wand painted on the blade. Harry decided to just wait and see what happened when he was sorted, maybe he’d be in Gryffindor so Harry could ask him some questions.

All of the new students were lined up in front of the stool now, and Professor McGonagall was next to the stool with a long piece of paper. Suddenly, the hat floated off of the stool that it was on, and began... singing.

“Many, many years before,  
There was a gigantic war.  
It was between both wizards and men.  
However, no one won in the end.  
When all the dead bodies lay strung out,  
Four voices, did ring out:  
Godric Gryffindor: Bold and true;  
Salazar Slytherin: Cunning and shrewd;  
Rowena Ravenclaw: Quick and bright;  
Helga Hufflepuff: Loyal and with might.  
Together these four made the place in which you stay,  
So that others may learn their magnificent ways.  
And so that a war like before would never happen again,  
To tutor their pupils, and help them become true men.  
So that the world may become a better place,  
They built Hogwarts, where you learn the magical ways.”

There was a magnificent amount of applause for the hat, like always, and when I dies down, Professor McGonagall brought the hat down from its hovering position, and back onto the stool, ready to sort the newcomers.

“When I call out your names,” she spoke loudly, “you will come up to this stool, place the hat on your head, then go to the table of the house that the hat designates you to. With that, let’s start: Vernon Crabbe!”

The boy that was first in line stepped up to the stool, and placed the hat on his head. His clumsy movements and unmistakable similarity caused Harry to believe that this was Vincent Crabbe’s, Malfoy’s friend’s, little brother. It was confirmed when he placed the hat on his head and it yelled out:

“SLYTHERIN!” The Slytherin table cheered, and Crabbe gave his brother a pat on the back as he sat down.

“Prancy Patil!” A small, cute little girl stepped up to the stool, and placed the hat on her head.

“RAVENCLAW!” yelled the hat after a second of being on her head.

“Aw, too bad,” said Parvati Patil, another fifth year Gryffindor who had been Harry’s date to a dance last year, “I was hoping Prancy’d be with me, not Padma. (her twin sister who was in Ravenclaw)”

“Akshay Dayal,” said Professor McGonagall. The next boy in line stepped up to the hat, and placed it on his head, waiting for less than a second.

“GRYFFINDOR!” shouted the hat. As with the rest of the new students, the Gryffindors clapped as he walked over to their table. The next name on the list took Harry by surprise:

“Aylar Dumbledore!” said Professor McGonagall with a hint of proudness in her voice. Could this be Professor Dumbledore’s son? If it wasn’t his son, than he surely looked a lot like Dumbledore. He had the same long nose, skinny figure, and a certain blissful look in his eyes. Dumbledore was also looking at him with proudness in his face.

Aylar confidently stepped up to the chair, and put the hat on, the hat looked as though it was thinking very hard, just as it had done with Harry.

“SLY- no... GRYFFINDOR!” yelled the hat. Harry looked shocked, that was the first time the hat had ever stuttered. Aylar didn’t look to happy, however, he must have wanted to be in Slytherin. But, the next second, as he was cheered over to the table, he looked excited and glad, so Harry thought he must’ve just imagined his sadness.

“Michael Whalen!” A small, skinny little boy stepped up to the chair.

“HUFFLEPUFF!” said the hat. The next five sortings went by uneventful (Christopher Zimmermann in Gryffindor, Vikram Kumar in Ravenclaw, Joe Coppelotti in Gryffindor, Pawan Kodandopani in Slytherin, Mike Baronowski in Gryffindor, and Oshi Mandahib in Hufflepuff). Then, the older-looking student walked up to the hat, and just as he was about to put it on, Dumbledore stood up.

“Tuh.. Tuh.. Sy? Tuhsyeh... neb? Tuy sy?..” stuttered Professor McGonagall.

“Tuh-sy-uh-neb,” said the boy, looking frustrated.

“Oh yes,” said Professor McGonagall looking embarrassed. “Tcieneb... uh...”

“Del-on-rah,” he pronounced to her, “Tcieneb Delonra. Sounds exactly like its spelled,” he smiled. The Great Hall gave a small laugh.

“Yes well... how about just Tci?”

“I am pleased to announce,” said Dumbledore, interrupting the boy placing the hat on his head, “that we have a new fifth-year student joining us this year from Durmstrang (another wizarding school). Since he was obviously not sorted here in his first year, he will be now, and I hope you will make him feel just as welcome as any other new student to your house.” With that, Dumbledore sat down and smiled. Tcieneb now looked extremely embarrassed as he sat there with the hat on his head. The hat looked as though it was thinking very hard, then it spoke:

“SLYHER- ahh!” Tcieneb shot up, and started walking over to the Gryffindor table, as though he didn’t even hear the hat say he was in Slytherin, or the fact that he made it fall on the floor. He walked straight up to Harry. The entire hall was laughing.

“Hello Harry!” he said. He had a deep voice that flowed nicely, “I saw you earlier and I wanted to get to meet you.” He put out a hand for Harry to shake.

“Uh, yeah. That’s great uh... Tci, but uh... you’re in Sly-” Harry was cut off.

“I just know we’ll be great friends, we both have a lot in common, you play Quidditch, I play it, you were raised by Muggles, I was too...” just then, Dumbledore spoke very loudly:

“Tci!” he said loudly. “Would you please proceed to the Slytherin table?” The entire hall exploded with laughter and Tci looked around.

“Oh, you mean... I’m not in Gryffindor?” he asked, looking almost scared.

“But... I did everything I was supposed to do.. I” he was cut off by Malfoy coming over and speaking to him.

“Come on over Tci, you don’t want to hang around this filth. Nice Swand you have there. I wanted one, but father said they’re too hard to find and not worth it. I can tell you...,” Malfoy trailed off indicating the thing in Tci’s sheath as he led him over to the Slytherin table.

“What was that about Hermione?” asked Harry as he poked her in the ribs.

“What? Huh? I wasn’t paying attention, I was busy studying.”

## CHAPTER 9 – CLONUSOUTS AND TRYOUTS

After Harry and Ron had a good laugh about Hermione, Dumbledore stood up to make an announcement for the year.

“Hello students, welcome to another, or first, year at Hogwarts!” he said loudly. The hall burst into applause, Fred and George whistled and screamed sarcastically.

“I hope,” said Dumbledore, “that you will all leave this year with your brains more full than how you arrived, and I hope you will all also go on to your next year in the first place.” He looked in the direction of Marcus Flint, the seventh-year Slytherin Quidditch team captain who had set a record of stupidity by staying back for three years. He just smiled a disgusting toothy grin while the people next to him patted him on the back.

“I would like to introduce,” continued Dumbledore, “two new teachers this year.” Harry just noticed the two people sitting next to Dumbledore. “Our new Defense Against the Dark Arts Teacher: Mrs. Arabella Figg!” The hall clapped loudly and Harry’s mouth opened wide. Why hadn’t she told him she’d be his new teacher? She stood up and waved. From the smile on her face Harry thought that the trial must’ve gone well. Even though she hadn’t told him, Harry was glad that Mrs. Figg was here, in case he had any more questions about the Order.

“And,” Dumbledore went on, “our new potions teacher, Mr. Mundungus Fletcher!” Harry’s jaw, if it was possible, fell even more towards the ground. Professor Snape, one of Harry’s only reasons, besides Malfoy, not to love Hogwarts, was gone! He looked up and down the tables for him, but there was no sight of him. Ron was looking ecstatic, and Hermione didn’t have any expression, she was still reading, oblivious to all around her.

This was turning into the greatest year of Harry’s life at Hogwarts. He was going to be with his mom, and Snape wasn’t going to be around to hate and punish him for no reason all the time!

Mundungus Fletcher stood up and waved like Arabella did. His robes were not black, but yellow and fluffy looking. He had long curly blonde hair, and pale skin. The applause for him was even louder than it was for Mrs. Figg, he even got a few standing ovations. Everyone was happy to be rid of Professor Snape. He was the most evil and unfair teacher Harry had. Everyone was happy, that is, except for the Slytherins. Snape was the head of the Slytherin House, and always favored them. Professor Fletcher sat down.

“Now that the announcements are out of the way,” said Dumbledore, “I invite you all to eat, drink, and make merry!” He smiled, and sat down. The second he sat down in his chair, huge bowls and plates of food appeared on each table. Harry took a little bit of everything, then a question came into his mind:

“Hey Hermione, how was your summer with Viktor?” he asked. Hermione looked up at him, slammed her book shut, and said, red in the face,

“I’d rather not talk about that right now Harry,” she retorted, with a stiffness in her voice. There was an awkward silence as they both stared at each other: Harry in shock, and Hermione glaring at him. Ron coughed loudly.

"Well then!" he said, trying to change the subject. "Ahem... uh... Hermione... uh... so, where's Crookshanks? I haven't seen her so far this school year." Hermione stopped squinting and looked at Ron.

"I packed him in a kitty cage," she said. "She's being brought up with the rest of the luggage, along with the rest of my books."

"Hermione," said Ron, "you're going to burn yourself out from studying before the time comes that you really have to cram."

"Oh, I'm not studying too hard now Ron, just building myself up slowly, I've decided on a little more than a book a day. Once the exams get closer, I'll start really studying."

"Hermione!" said Ron, "Not even Percy studied that much the week before the tests! And he got an almost perfect score!"

"Yes, well, he would've gotten a perfect if he'd started sooner," she said. Ron turned away from her and rolled his eyes at Harry.

"She's crazy you know, she going to drive herself insane," he said.

"Hmph fa mph mf fum fa," said Harry as he spoke with mashed potatoes spilling out of his mouth. Just then, a golden piece of parchment appeared in front of Harry. It was his schedule for next year. He folded it up, and put it in his pocket. Just then, he saw Fred and George leave the table and, remembering the meeting, he took a last swig of pumpkin juice, and ran off after them, spitting at Ron, "Shee ya tenite!"

Harry soon caught up with Fred and George and they walked the rest of the way to the Quidditch field. When they arrived, Harry saw the other three members of the team Angelina Johnson, Alicia Spinnet, and Katie Bell. They were each standing there looking annoyed.

"What took you so long?" asked Angelina. "You told us to meet you here just before the feast!" Fred and George looked at each other and smiled.

"Yeah, oh, well, we decided we were more hungry than eager to get started. Thanks for your food Angelina!" said Fred. All three of them started angrily at the twins.

"Anyway..." said George breaking the silence, "onto business! As all of you know, we are short a Keeper and a captain."

This was true, Harry thought. He hadn't thought about it before but when Oliver Wood graduated, their previous captain and Keeper, they became short one player, and they never got a new one.

"So," started Fred, "we need to vote on our new captain, and have tryouts for the new Keeper." He reached into his pocket and took out six pieces of tiny paper, and a small box. He passed out a piece of paper to each.

"What's this for?" asked Katie in a squeaky voice.

"It's a Muggle voting system, dad told me about it," said Fred after each person had a piece of paper. "Each of you writes down who you think is the best person to be captain, put it in the box, then I'll tally up the votes and whoever has the most votes is the new captain!"

Angelina, Alicia, and Katie looked at each other awkwardly, thinking that there was no way that this would work, and something had to go wrong. Harry smiled, he knew that most wizards were brilliant, but had no common sense. He quickly wrote down: 'Fred Weasley' on the piece of paper, and put it in the box. The three girls looked at

Harry as though he was a genius, then quickly copied him, and put their votes in the box. Fred and George did the same seconds after.

“Alright!” said George, picking up the box and shaking it. “Let’s see!” he opened the box up, and looked extremely hopeful. He reached his hand inside the box, and pulled out a piece of paper, “One vote for...” he read the paper, and frowned, “Fred Weasley”.

Fred looked very happy. He drew a red transparent sphere in the air with the words ‘Fred’ above it and made his vote fly into it. George reached his hand in for the next one

“The next vote is for...” he smiled, “George Weasley!” He created a blue sphere with ‘George’ written above it in the air, and placed his vote inside it. He shot his tongue out at Fred who was looking sulky. It would definitely be between those two, thought Harry. They were excellent Beaters, and very talented when it came to strategy.

George reached into the box and pulled out the next vote, as he read it, his eyebrows went up, “One vote for Harry Potter!” he said surprised. Harry was even more surprised than George was. Sure, Harry was a pretty good Seeker, but him... captain of the team? Harry didn’t think that would suit him very well. But there were still three more votes to go, thought Harry, maybe that vote was just a fluke.

“Alright then,” said George after Fred created a yellow sphere and put Harry’s vote inside it, “the next vote is for... Fred.” he said blankly. Fred happily shot the vote into his red sphere. Good, thought Harry, his chances were getting less of becoming captain.

“The next vote is for...” said George as Fred made a drum magically appear in front of him, and he started tapping it very fast, “...Harry.” Fred made a cymbal appear, and he whacked it creating a loud sound. Harry was now tied with Fred. Once more vote for him, and he was captain. Now that the initial shock of the thought of him being captain was over, Harry thought it wouldn’t be so bad. He pictured himself holding the Quidditch House cup with hundreds of cheering people all around him.

“Okay... the last and final vote is for...” said George suspensefully as he reached into the box, and took out the last piece of paper, “Harry Potter!” he yelled. He was apparently happy that at least Fred hadn’t made captain. He put the votes for Harry into the yellow sphere, and it exploded into a small fireworks display, destroying Fred and George’s votes.

Harry was standing there with a look of shock on his face. He was now the captain of the team... but how? He voted for Fred, Fred and George obviously voted for themselves so... all three girls must’ve voted for him. Harry looked over at them to see that they were slightly giggling.

“Alright Harry,” said Fred nicely to him, apparently over his shock, “since you’re captain, you make all the decisions... sure you wouldn’t rather let me do it?” he asked, Harry was about to speak when Alicia shouted,

“No way Fred! Harry earned that position! Ever since he joined the team, we’ve only lost one game, and that wasn’t even his fault. He deserves to be captain!”

“Alright, alright!” said Fred. “Anyway Harry, you do need to decide who’s going to be the next Keeper. Have anyone in mind?” Harry thought about Ron.

“Yeah, your brother!” said Harry. Fred and George snorted.

“Heh, Harry,” said George, “you can’t let your friendships interfere with your decisions! Ron’s okay, but we need someone awesome!”

"Alright," said Harry, "let's just have tryouts this Friday. The best person gets the position."

"Sounds good," said everyone at the same time. It was so perfectly synchronized, Harry thought they must have rehearsed. They all left back up to the Gryffindor Common Room. As Harry reached the painting of the Fat Lady who guarded the room, he saw one of his other friends, Neville Longbottom, curled up outside.

"What are you doing Neville?" asked Harry. Neville sprang up.

"I've forgotten the password to get in Harry! Hermione told me just a second ago, but I forgot it!" Neville looked pleadingly at Harry. Neville never did have much of a brain.

"Password," said the fat lady in the portrait.

"I know, hold on a sec, I've forgotten it!" said Neville.

"No dear," she looked at Neville, "the password is: Password." She smiled and swung open. Neville turned around and gaped at Harry in a dumbfounded surprise.

"She's been saying that for the past five minutes, and I didn't figure it out!" said Neville as he waddled into the room. As Harry walked in, he saw a large group of people all standing together. He walked over to see what it was all about.

They were all standing in a circle, with a small boy in the middle that Harry recognized as Aylar Dumbledore. There was a small animal in front of him that Harry had never seen before. In fact, people all around him were holding animals that he'd never seen before. Some looked like aardvarks, only with wings. Others had elongated faces with scaly feet, and one looked like a purple blob with red eyes. The creature in front of Aylar was long like a snake, but it had long golden mandibles instead of a face. He picked it up, and wrapped it around his neck. It licked him on the cheek.

"I think I'll call you a crake, a crab and a snake... combined!" he smiled and the people all around him clapped. He took a bow. What was going on? Aylar suddenly looked at Harry.

"Harry Potter?" he asked, looking at the scar on Harry's face.

"Yes, that's my name. What are you doing?" Harry asked.

"Oh, just conjuring up some pets for people who don't have any," said Aylar. He smiled and waved his wand at all the animals. The people who were holding them looked as though they were in a state of pure bliss.

"You want one Harry? I've got plenty more ideas left!" he said, tapping his head with his wand.

"No, no thanks. I've got an owl," said Harry, amazed that a boy who hadn't even started school yet could conjure animals right out of his wand. That was magic that was too advanced for some seventh years!

"Oh, all right. But, if you ever need a pet to guard your room, I'll happily make a vicious, spiked, fluffy ball for you!"

"Harry!" said Hermione. "Did you already show the new first year boys where their rooms are?"

Harry went red. He forgot that prefects had responsibilities: among those being to show first years where their dormitories are. Harry looked around and saw the four new boys standing around Aylar.

"Come on guys," said Harry to them, "I have to show you where you're sleeping."

"But we want to see Aylar do more tricks!" said Joe.

"Not today," said Harry. "Maybe tomorrow. Come on, let's go." All five of the boys followed him up the stairs leading them to their room. Harry opened the door, and immediately the five of them shot in.

"Have fun," said Harry quickly, trying to get away from them.

"Wait!" yelled Aylar. "You mean I have to share a room with these... others? I thought we all got our own rooms!"

"No such luck Aylar," said Harry. "Good night!"

"Wait!" yelled Akshay. "Where can I plug in my computer?"

"Muggle things don't work here," said Harry, becoming very impatient. Didn't these kids know anything? He wanted to get way from them.

"Wait, where can I put up my Kanji charts?"

"You're not putting them up on my part of the room!" yelled Chris.

"Baka!" yelled Mike.

"What did you call me?"

"BAKA!"

"Why you little!" yelled Chris, jumping off of his bed, and right onto Mike's face. Harry decided it was time to leave, and let the boys figure this stuff out for themselves.

"Good bye boys!" said Harry, quickly shutting the door. He breathed a sigh of relief as he turned away from their door, and took a step away. But, he felt suddenly weighed down at his feet, and he fell over onto the ground.

"Ow!" yelled Harry, falling right onto his face. "What the?" Harry looked down at his feet and saw, holding onto his legs, the skinny first year boy, Joe. He scrunched up his face, and suddenly excreted a horrible and incoherent statement from his mouth:

"I LIKE THE PIEZ!" he yelled as loud as he could.

"Okay..." said Harry, peeling Joe off of his legs, and throwing him back into the chaotic room, happy he wasn't part of that group. Harry hoped that Aylar, appearing to be the smartest of them would whip them into shape.

Harry ran up to his room. He opened the door, and saw Ron sitting on his bed, shaking his wand up and down, as though trying to force something out.

"Um, what are you doing Ron?" asked Harry.

"Oh," said Ron, still working on moving his wand, "just... trying to make a pet like that Aylar kid." Just then, a silvery ball flopped out of Ron's wand, stood on the floor for a second, then melted into a puddle.

"Darn," said Ron. He stopped shaking his wand, "that's the third time that has happened!"

\* \* \*

Harry's first day of classes was great. He woke up on time, came downstairs, ate breakfast, then hurried off to his first class: Care of Magical Creatures. When he arrived there, Hagrid was pacing back and forth by his hut, anxiously awaiting class. When he saw Harry, he smiled at him.

"Hullo Harry! Can't wait ter get started!" he said, beaming. Harry looked next to Hagrid and noticed there was a large box. The lid was sealed, so Harry couldn't look inside it. But, he guessed it had something to do with the dragons.

As he stood there, more kids came down, getting ready for class. Hermione and Ron were among the first. This was the first time Harry saw Hermione without a book so far this year.

"Hermione!" said Harry when he saw her. "You're not reading!" Rod nodded in agreement, and held back a laugh as he walked away from Hermione and over to Harry.

"Don't be stupid Harry," said Hermione. "I'm not going to miss lessons because of studying, I'm only going to study after classes." She smiled and walked over to Ron. More and more Gryffindor students came down to Hagrid's hut.

Most of Harry's classes were with another House, and Care of Magical Creatures was with the Slytherins. Harry saw two Slytherins arriving, and recognized one as Tci, and the other as Malfoy. They were engaged in conversation, though Tci looked more interested in the grounds than he did with Malfoy's blab. Then, when Tci saw Harry, he shot over, forgetting about Malfoy.

As he ran, Harry heard some girls giggle. He looked around to see what it was that was causing it, then he looked more closely at Tci. He was wearing a black jacket, long red pants, and his Swand, but other than that, he had no shirt on. His chest and stomach were, for the most part exposed.

"Hey Harry!" he said as he finally arrived next to Harry.

"Err- uh... hi Tci..." said Harry awkwardly. He had never had a serious conversation with a Slytherin before, so this was quite new to him.

"Brrr!" he shivered. "Kind of brisk today, eh Harry?" he said. Hermione and Ron laughed out loud.

"Well, Tci, maybe it wouldn't be as cold if you put a shirt on," said Harry, using his usual voice and attitude he used towards all Slytherins. Tci looked down his front, then looked back at Harry with a confused look.

"You mean, people wear shirts here... and robes?" he asked. All the people around him, except for Harry and Malfoy burst into laughter.

"Yeah, Tci, that's what most people in the world do," said Ron, still laughing. Tci just shrugged.

"Well, at Durmstrang," he said seriously, "third years and up are encouraged just to wear a jacket to increase our mind power. We must use our mind all the time to keep ourselves thinking we are warm. It is like constantly making your brain lift weights, it helps your mind grow and become more powerful." Everyone around him stopped laughing. Malfoy finally arrived over.

"Hey Tci, why don't you show all of them your Swand?" he said slyly.

"Okay," said Tci. He quickly reached into the quiver on his back, and pulled out the Swand. It looked exactly like a sword, except for the blade that had a picture of a wand on it. The rest of the blade looked like a highly polished mirror, and the handle was golden. Tci brandished it, and swung it around a few times, doing a few amazing moves. Everyone clapped when he put the sword back in.

"Is that you wand?" asked Ron, amazed.

"Yeah," said Tci, "only, a Swand is much more powerful than a regular wand."

"Not to mention more rare and valuable," said Malfoy, putting his hand on Tci's shoulder. Tci rubbed it off. Malfoy, looking a little annoyed, went over and stood with Crabbe and Goyle.

"You know Harry," said Tci very quietly, bending over, "I really wanted to be in Gryffindor. I can't believe the hat put me in Slytherin." He stood back up, and gave a small shudder. Harry thought he might get to like Tci.

Harry noticed that the entire class had now arrived, and Hagrid clapped his hands together very loudly.

"A'ight everyone!" he said excitedly. "Today we're gonna be startin' a lesson that will take us through th' res' of th' year!" He walked over to the giant box that Harry saw earlier, and threw off the lid. He grabbed from inside what appeared to be large eggs, each a different color with a different pattern on it. Harry recognized that they were:

"Dragon eggs!" yelled Hagrid, "for th' res' of th' year, yer gonna raise and teach yer dragon. Then, t'wards the end, we'll see who has done the best job by having a lil' competition." He smiled, "Now I wan' each of you ter come up, an' pick an egg. Look at yer books if you want a specific kind. Today I just wan' you to look at 'em and read a few pages 'bout 'em, no getting' ready to hatch or anything' like that just yet." He moved out of the way

"Well what are yeh waitin' fer? Get one!" All of the kids came running up, and grabbed a random egg. Harry instead came up to Hagrid.

"Hagrid," asked Harry, "isn't it illegal to have a dragon?"

"Well, usually it is 'Arry, but... Dumbledore made a few deals with the Ministry, said that kids should be trained to deal with everything even dragons."

"But, Hagrid," said Ron who was next to Harry, "dragons don't stay small forever! Where are we gonna keep them when they get... huge?"

"Oh, me an' Dumbledore got all that worked out, great man that Dumbledore is, got a special room all set up to keep 'em good." Their questions satisfied, Harry and Ron then went over to the box of eggs where the rest of the class had been. Ron took a red egg with yellow spots on it, and Harry took a golden egg that had no pattern on it. Nobody had bothered to consult their books on choosing, too excited to bother, but now they were all rushing to see what kind they had gotten.

"Oh! I got an African Abysmall," said Ron.

"Yer quite luck there Ron," said Hagrid. "Even though th' African Abysmalls may start out bad, each one of 'em has a special power."

"Yeah," said Ron, "but it says here that no one has ever found out what that special power is."

"Well, maybe ye'll be th' first," said Hagrid.

"What kind did you get Harry?"

"I don't know yet," said Harry, looking through his book. Finally, he stopped on a page. "Here it is! Oh no, I got a Hungarian Horntail." Last year, Harry had to fight one as part of the Triwizard Tournament, and it was a massive and terrible beast.

"Well, you're gonna have your hands full all year!" said Ron. "Hermione, what did you get?"

Hermione was still looking rapidly through her book.

"No, it can't be!" she said. "Why didn't I look more carefully before I chose?" she asked herself.

“What is it Hermione?” asked Harry. He looked at Hermione’s egg that was a dark green with light blue stripes.

“I wanted a Welch Green,” she said, “but that dragon’s egg is light blue with dark green stripes, not the other way around!”

“Well than, what did you get?” asked Ron. Hermione finally stopped on a page, and pointed to a dragon that Harry couldn’t see.,

“I got a... a... Transylvanian Three-Headed Terror!” she said, looking horrified. Ron and Harry laughed.

“Geez Hermione!” said Ron. “And I thought Harry was gonna have a hard time, you’ll have three times as much trouble!”

The rest of the class went okay, they all spent it researching their eggs. Harry didn’t have to ask Malfoy what he’d gotten, from seeing his egg, he knew he had gotten a Hungarian Horntail just like Harry did. Tci had a pure-black egg that Harry looked up and saw that it was a Mongolian Mutilator, a large dragon with an extremely fiery temper.

When the bell rang, Harry, Ron, and Hermione went to their first Defense Against the Dark Arts class of the year. As it turned out, Mrs. Figg was just as good a teacher as she was a person. She spent the whole class trying to teach them basic defense spells: shields.

According to Mrs. Figg, this was the first time she’d ever seen a shield spell used to inflict damage on someone. Neville somehow messed it up, and it hit Parvati right in the forehead. Highly embarrassed, Neville ran over, and apologized at least one hundred times. Parvati didn’t seem too angry though, especially after she put a hex on Neville that caused his nose to grow to the size of a beach ball.

“Now now!” said Mrs. Figg after Parvati hexed Neville. “No cursing in class! Come on over Neville, I’ll show you how to do it right.” She spent the rest of the class tutoring him, and when the bell rang, Neville could do it better than any other student in the class. His shield was perfectly white and shiny, appearing exactly one foot in front of him like it was supposed to. As he strutted out of the classroom, looking especially smug, Mrs. Figg called Harry over.

“Harry, could I see you for a minute?” she asked. Harry mouthed ‘see you in a minute’ to Ron and Hermione as they stepped out.

“Harry,” she said, “we need to get Fawkes.” Harry looked at her, amazed at first, then realizing that they needed two more phoenixes to bring his mom back to life. Fawkes seemed like the perfect phoenix for the job. “I heard that Dumbledore has to go to the Ministry on Saturday on some business, so we need to get him this then. It will be one of the only times this year that he will be gone. I’ll meet you outside his office at ten o’ clock at night, okay?”

“Alright,” said Harry. This would be the first time he’d ever stolen anything from Dumbledore. Harry could only imagine what would happen if he got caught. He shuddered at the thought.

Harry wasn’t really paying attention during his Charms class next period, even thought they were learning the exciting Clone Charm today. Harry was thinking about tonight, and what was going to happen. Just then, Hermione nudged him in the side.

“Harry!” she whispered, ‘the Cloning Charm is one of the most important spells you’ll learn this year! Pay attention!” Harry swung his eyes over to Professor Flitwick who was talking.

“... the Cloning Charm is unique from all other spells in magic due to one fact! Instead of it taxing your mind, it strains your body! The spell takes some of your energy, and uses that to create new material... the clone. Even if you are a smart wizard, more intelligent even than Dumbledore himself, you will not be able to perform this charm, you need a strong body to do it!” He pointed his wand at a pillow in front of him.

“Clonusout!” he yelled. A white ray shot out of his wand, and hit the pillow. A hazy copy of the pillow appeared next to the original one. It was like a TV that was stuck on the black and white fuzz, it wasn’t coming in very clear. Professor Flitwick then grunted, quite loudly, and the blurry copy disappeared. He was breathing hard.

“I... hope... you... now see... how much... energy... it takes...” he panted. “Now... you... try!” he collapsed on the pillow he was trying to copy. In front of every student was a small rock that they had to copy. Each of them pointed their wand at the rock and yelled,

“Clonusout!” It was much easier than professor Flitwick made it look. Harry made about twenty copies of the rock before he even felt slightly tired. The bell rang, and everyone filed out, everyone, that is, except for Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas (two other Gryffindor boys). Each of them made a copy of sleeping Professor Flitwick, and then ran out. They shut the door loudly, and everyone put their ears to the door, not being able to wait to hear Professor Flitwick’s reaction. Suddenly, they heard him wake up.

“AHH! HELP! DARK MAGIC!” they heard Professor Flitwick (or at least one of his copies) yell as they all walked away laughing, back to the Gryffindor common room.

## CHAPTER 10 – DECISIONS

The rest of Harry's classes weren't nearly as exciting as his others. Divination (predicting the future) was just as bad as always. The teacher, Professor Trelawney, seemed to have forgotten that she'd already taught crystal ball gazing, and was repeating it. It did improve, however, from the last two years when she kept predicting his death. She hadn't said Harry would die even once yet.

Herbology (the study of magical plants) wasn't as bad as Divination since they were at least doing new things. They were studying plantimals, plant versions of animals. It was a fun lesson, especially when a plant version of a kangaroo started bouncing all over and chasing Neville.

Transfiguration wasn't as much fun as it was interesting. They were learning how to transfigure themselves. They started by just making their fingers scaly or fluffy, but Professor McGonagall said, that by the end of the year, they should know how to change almost all of their bodies, though of course not to the level of an Animagus.

Potions was so much better this year, Harry almost looked forward to it rather than dread it. Professor Fletcher, it seemed, knew even more about potions than Snape did, and he had a much nicer demeanor. Instead of having Gryffindor lose twenty or fifty points each class, it gained that much. However, Tci kept Slytherin in balance. It seemed he knew as much about magic as Hermione.

"Who can tell me the main ingredient of a Necrevival Potion?" asked Professor Fletcher one day in class. Tci's hand flew up half a second before Hermione's.

"Yes Mr.. uh... Tci?"

"The ingredients of a Necrevival Potion are, one: a carcass of a dead person or animal, two: three drops of blood from that person or animal, three: blood of a tri-corn, and four: the eye of a mandrake. While some say that the skeleton is the most important for the mixture, the things that will come alive, others argue that the blood of a tri-corn is more important. It has been shown that the potion itself can come alive without the skeleton, but not without the blood of a tri-corn."

"The Necrevival Potion is used to bring skeletons to life. Though the revived skeleton will have no abilities or memories from its former life, that doesn't it mean it can't fight or used magic. Hordes of revived skeletons are a favorite army for dark wizards." He stopped with everyone in the class gaping at him. Hermione was looking especially angry.

"How'd he know all that?" she asked Harry quietly. "I didn't even know all that and I've read all the books on dark potions!"

"A very good response," said Professor Fletcher. "A much greater one than I would have expected from a fifth year. Twenty points to Slytherin. Even though we will obviously not be reviving human skeletons with this, we may be bringing some smaller beings back." Malfoy patted Tci on the back and Tci didn't react at all, he just kept sitting there as though he had just given a basic answer to an easy question. There was something more to Tci, but Harry didn't know if he'd ever find out what it was.

Before long, the tryouts for the Gryffindor Quidditch team came. Fred and George put up signs up all over the school advertising it, so when the time came, there were about fifteen Gryffindors ready to try out for the team. Since Harry was captain, it was his responsibility and decision how to run it, and who, from the fifteen, to choose.

"All right!" yelled Harry over the voices of the fifteen people trying out. "Line up here in front of me, and we'll do some tests!" They all did as he said, and filed in front of him. Harry recognized a few people: Seamus, and Dean were there, and so was Ron. One of Fred and George's friends, Lee Jordan, was there too. Another boy, Colin Creevey, was there. He was a bit of an excessive fan of Harry's, always trying to get his picture or something. This year, however, he hadn't been much of a bother to Harry, and he almost forgot about him since he wasn't breathing down his neck every second. Harry didn't know the eleven others by name, but knew their faces.

"I am captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team, and I will be deciding who will be the Keeper for this team!" said Harry loudly. Some of the people looked at him confused, and Ron gave him a 'why didn't you tell me that!' look. Harry felt a little guilty, he should have told Ron that he was captain, but he didn't want Ron thinking he'd give him an unfair advantage, even though he was his best friend.

"I'm sure that since you're here, most of you know how to play Quidditch," continued Harry, "but, I'd just like to do a quick review of what it is: there are seven players on a team: three Chasers (he nodded toward Angelina, Alicia, and Katie). They chase the large red ball called the Quaffle, and score goals. A team also has two Beaters (he waved his hand at Fred and George) who whack two large balls at the other team to try and de-broom them. A team also consists of a Seeker... me. I have to find the tiny golden Snitch, and end the game, giving the Gryffindor team an extra one hundred and fifty points. Now, a team also needs a Keeper to prevent the other team from scoring goals. That's what you all are here to try and become."

"I thought we'd have a small tournament for the tryouts, and whoever's left at the end will get the position. Sound fair?" he asked the Keeper hopefuls. They all nodded, and started getting ready to mount their brooms.

"What we'll do first is test your accuracy," said Harry. "I'll throw a ball in the air, and I want you to fly up and hit it back toward me as close as you can, alright?" The group nodded again. "Now, form a line, and get ready. You go up when you think it's time, and everyone who succeeds will go onto the next round."

Harry looked at all the nervous faces. Most of them were white, and some of them were even a little green. Ron was among the few that looked confident.

"Ready... set... go!" yelled Harry as he threw the Quaffle up in the air.

The first person in line was Ron. He blasted off the ground, met the ball at its maximum height, did a fancy spin, and the ball came soaring back, right into Harry's arms. Ron came quickly back to the ground. He had done a perfect job!

"Excellent work Ron!" yelled Harry. "Next!" He threw the ball back into the air, and Lee Jordan flew up, earlier than Ron did. Harry had to lean just a slight bit to catch the ball when it came flying back at him.

Each other person went, and only six people had passed. Everyone except for Ron, Lee, Seamus, Dean, Colin (much to Harry's dismay) and another Gryffindor whose name Harry learned was Bill McCunley. The other nine left, muttering to themselves that they 'didn't really want to be on that dumb team anyway'.

"Our next test," said Harry, "will be to test your blocking ability. Fred, George, and I will be shooting Quaffles at you. Every time you block one, you will get one point." Harry pointed to a magical scoreboard that Angelina, Alicia and Katie were looking after.

"Whoever the top three are that block the most will go onto the last round. Ready... set... go!" Fred, George, and Harry started cloning Quaffles by what seemed like hundreds at a time. They shot them towards the six hopefuls at extreme speeds, and Harry was glad he was doing the shooting rather than the blocking.

There was a mad rush for every Quaffle. Even though they came from every direction, all of them seemed to want the same one at the same time, and ended up crashing into each other. After five minutes of this chaos, Harry thought they had enough, and stopped the test. Angelina, Alicia, and Katie looked positively exhausted from keeping track, just as exhausted as Harry, Fred, and George were from cloning all the Quaffles.

Once Harry caught his breath, he looked up at the scoreboard and saw that Ron, Bill, and Colin were each tied with seventy-two Quaffles blocked each. Harry walked over to Dean and Seamus (who were lying on top of each other and appearing to be unconscious) and told them sorry, but they didn't win. They didn't seem too sad, on the contrary, they looked positively thrilled that they wouldn't have to be tortured anymore.

"For the final test!" yelled Harry to Colin, Ron, and Bill. "We will test your speed! It's as simple as this: the first one to the other end of the Quidditch field first wins." Colin, Ron, and Bill each mounted their brooms, and grasped the front tightly. Each was looking just as much determined as the other.

"What will I do if Ron doesn't win?" Harry thought to himself for a second.

"Nah!" he reassured himself. "Ron will win for sure! He's the best." Harry blew on a whistle, and the three hopefuls were off, with Fred at one side of the three, and George at the other, to see who crossed the finish line first.

They seemed to be speeding bullets rather than humans as all three shot forward. Even Fred and George were having a tough time keeping up. Since the race was so fast, it was over very quickly. Less than five seconds had passed when it was finally over. Harry saw Fred and George signal him to come over. He shot over there on his broom, and saw glum looks on their faces.

"Harry," said George, "I think we have a tie." He pointed to Ron and Bill who were currently arguing with each other.

"How can there be a tie?" asked Harry, worried that he would have to choose between the two of them.

"Movus Pictorus," he whispered as he tapped his wand on the picture. Harry moved the image of Ron just a tiny bit forward, so it appeared that he had won.

"What are you talking about!" yelled Harry as he held up the changed picture, "Ron is clearly the winner!" Ron grinned eagerly as Harry gave the picture to Fred and George. They scratched their heads.

"How'd we miss that, George?" asked Fred, "Ron did win after all! Congratulations Ron!" Bill and Colin left looking sulky, and Ron got a handshake from each of the members on the team. Harry was feeling a little guilty. Did he do the right thing? What if Bill was the better player?

"But, Bill and Ron are so close talent-wise, it didn't really matter," Harry reassured himself silently as he shook Ron's hand.

"I can't believe it Harry!" said Ron. "Ever since Charlie was on the team, I've wanted to be on it too. I can't believe I'll be on it... with you!"

"Yeah... great Ron!" said Harry, trying to sound happy, but still feeling guilty.

"Here we go!" said Fred and George as they brought in several mugs filled with yellowish-brown liquid.

"What is that?" asked Katie.

"Butterbeer!" said Fred. "To celebrate our new Keeper!" Everyone eagerly grabbed a glass, and they cheered them all in the air, creating a loud 'clink'.

"To a Gryffindor victory on Sunday!" said Harry. That would be their first game of the Quidditch season, and their first game with Ron, against Hufflepuff.

As everyone chugged it down, Harry noticed Fred and George laughing.

"What's so funny?" asked Ron, he had obviously noticed it too.

"Your face!" said George still laughing.

"No seriously!" said Ron.

"Seriously, your face!" said Fred. Harry looked over at Ron, and burst out laughing. Ron's face had turned into one of a bunny's, ears and all. Suddenly, the same thing happened to Angelina, Alicia, and Katie. Fred and George laughed even more, and Fred fell onto the floor. Harry started to worry that the same would happen to him, after all, they did test their other invention on him.

"Don't worry Harry," said Fred, sensing Harry's feeling, and recovering from his fall onto the floor. "Yours and ours butterbeers are real." After everyone's face turned back to normal, Alicia asked,

"What was that?"

"Bunny-Butterbeer! We also have Beetle, Bear and Bumble-Bee!" said George. "A real bargain! Only a galleon a gallon!"

The next day went by very quickly to Harry. All he really remembered was at breakfast when Ron was bragging to everyone that he was on the team, and also pestering Hermione to tell him what happened at Krum's house over the summer, and to 'get her face out of that book' that she was reading. She did neither.

All that happened toward night was Aylar, still showing off his magic by making Butterbeer come pout of his wand and into glasses (which he had also conjured up). All day long, Harry was nervously anticipating kidnapping Fawkes, and he wasn't able to lessen that fear by talking to Ron and Hermione about it.

Finally, when ten o' clock came around, Harry said he'd forgotten his books in Transfiguration as an excuse to leave, and he slipped out the door with his invisibility cloak tucked under his shirt. The invisibility cloak was the only thing Harry had inherited from his father (except for the giant fortune), and it made whoever wore it completely invisible, and it came in handy many times before.

It didn't take Harry too long to get to Dumbledore's office, it was pretty close to the Gryffindor room. As he got closer, he wondered where Mrs. Figg was. He looked around, and suddenly saw that she was next to him. He slipped the hood off his head.

"How'd you get here so fast?" asked Harry.

"Oh," said Mrs. Figg, "I've been here for a while, Harry. Eventually, you'll learn magic that can make you invisible without a cloak." Harry nodded, and Mrs. Figg walked over to Dumbledore's door that was guarded by a gargoyle. She was holding a small, light-blue cube.

"Wizard Scout Cookies", she said, and the gargoyle moved out of the way, and the door opened. She and Harry quietly and quickly walked up the staircase leading to his office.

It was just as Harry remembered it. He had been in Dumbledore's office before, but never with the sort of intentions that he had now. It was a large circular room with many pictures of the old headmasters on the wall. In one part of the room was a cage, and a tiny black bird was in it.

"It works out nicely doesn't it?" said Mrs. Figg, "The day that Dumbledore is out is the day Fawkes will burn (burst into flames and be reborn). That's when they're the weakest you know." They top-toed over to the cage where the tiny black bird (that looked nothing like a phoenix) was sleeping.

"Now Harry," said Arabella, "this is when you come in. I'm too weak to do it, but I need you to clone a copy of Fawkes." Harry swallowed hard.

"Alright," he said, thinking that all this would be worth it when he was with his mom. He walked even closer to the cage, and brandished his wand, feeling extremely conscious of everything around him, and trying not to jump at every minute sound.

"Clonusout!" he said quickly. Another Fawkes suddenly appeared inside the cage right next to the original one.

"Good job Harry!" said Arabella. She then opened the small door to the cage, and grabbed the original Fawkes around the mouth, so that it couldn't make any noise. She touched the blue cube that she had brought with her to the head of the now awake Fawkes, and he suddenly flashed blue. Then, he disappeared, evidently into the box.

"Now lets get out of here, Harry," she said, stuffing the cube back into her pocket. Harry nodded in agreement: he wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible. As she put the box in her cloak pocket, and started walking down the stairs, she put out her arm, signaling Harry to stop. He froze right where he was on the staircase. What happened? Was someone coming?

Someone was definitely coming. Harry could hear footsteps coming from far down the hallway that were getting closer every second. As Harry saw Mrs. Figg turn invisible, he slipped his cloak back on. Harry heard Arabella open the door just a tiny bit more, and then run out of it. Harry followed her, and closed the door behind him. As Harry ran across the hallway, he glanced down to see who was coming. It took him by surprise to see who it was: Tci. What was he doing here at this time?

However, Harry didn't have time to ponder this. He heard Arabella continuing to run down the halls, and Harry did not stop following her. He didn't want to fall behind. They ran all the way to her office, and then, Harry heard her finally stop. She became visible again.

"Good job there, Harry, I'm glad you weren't caught," she said, panting slightly. "We just need one more phoenix now. I'll contact Lupin and Sirius about that later."

"About them," asked Harry, "how did their trial go?"

"Very well Harry," she said. "Sirius presented his side of the story regarding killing Wormtail, and Lupin presented his story regarding the thought that everyone thought Sirius was trying to kill Harry. If they aren't found innocent, I will be very surprised."

"That's great," said Harry, feeling relief flow through him.. "One other thing, why don't we just get another clone of Fawkes for the other necessary phoenix? Won't that save time?" Arabella laughed.

"Harry, oh, there's still so much you don't understand about magic. Clones, while they share the same physical and chemical attributes of the original, do not contain the same magical properties. So, if we were to use a copy of a phoenix, it would be just as good to use an ostrich. Understand?"

"Yeah, I think so," said Harry, his head spinning. "One last question though: did you figure out how all the people in Diagon Alley saw Sirius?"

"No Harry," she said, "that is still a mystery. All witnesses said they saw Sirius Black, not one of them mentioned a dog. But, enough of that, I guess you'll be wanting to go to bed now, you've had a very exciting night."

"Yeah, see you in class tomorrow," said Harry as he walked off, not really wanting to leave, but also wanting to rest as well. When he came back into the Gryffindor room, no one was there, they had all gone to bed. Harry decided to do the same, and headed up to his room. As he collapsed on his bed, he felt something under his stomach. He stuck his hand under it, and grabbed a piece of parchment. It read:

"I know what you did Harry Potter, I know what you did..."

## **Chapter 11- Gryffindor vs. Hufflepuff**

Harry didn't get much sleep that night, he was so worried over the note. Not only was he scared of who saw him and Arabella steal Fawkes, but he was also worried that he'd be sent back to the Dursleys, his mom wouldn't be brought back, and he'd never see Sirius, Ron, Hermione, or anyone else again. Worst of all, he couldn't tell Hermione or Ron. Sirius, Lupin, and Arabella made it very clear that they didn't want Harry saying anything about the Order.

So, Harry awoke the next morning, after what felt like two seconds of sleep, and waddled downstairs to the great hall where breakfast was being served. He took a seat next to Hermione and Ron, who had each already almost finished breakfast. Ron was engaged in conversation with Hermione.

"So, Hermione, what every happened to S.P.E.W?" he asked. S.P.E.W. was the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare, a club that Hermione had started as a small protest group for elf right. She believed that all elves should be paid and given days off from work. However, they were all horrified at even the thought of that, and continued to work. They believed doing thankless work was their purpose in life.

"Well Ron," answered Hermione, "over the Summer, I found that there are some very large idiots out there, and to continue with S.P.E.W. would be hopeless as long as they exist on this planet."

"Does this have something to do with Krum?" asked Ron slyly, and leaning his elbow across the table. Hermione, however, became very interested in polishing her prefect badge with a napkin.

Throughout breakfast, Harry kept wondering about the note he got. Who had sent it? How had he seen him? Then, it hit him. Who was the only other person that could've known what he had done?

It was Tci. He was walking by while they were leaving, and he probably saw the door shut by some invisible force, and ran over to investigate. Harry also remembered he forgot to lock the door! Tci must've gone up to Dumbledore's office too! He might've used his advanced magic to see that Fawkes had just been copied or something.

Harry's blood just went cold, and he began to sweat. He looked over at the Slytherin table, and looked at Tci, next to Malfoy, pretending not to like it over there. Oh, Tci was the most appropriate person for Slytherin Harry ever saw.

Just as Harry was about to walk over to Tci and tell him he knew that the letter was from him, an explosion of owls appeared in the Great Hall. Hundreds of them swooped in, and delivered their parcels to the right person. A brown owl came to Hermione with a newspaper attached to its leg. She put some money in the owl's sack, and it flew away. Hermione took out the newspaper, and began to read. The second her eyes met the paper,

though, her face turned into an expression of terror. She turned the paper around, and in big letters at the top, it read: "Sirius Black and Remus Lupin Found Guilty of Murder and Conspiracy". Harry grabbed the paper, and read the rest:

Today, the ministry judge sentenced both Sirius Black (convicted of murder) and Remus Lupin (convicted of conspiracy of knowing where Sirius Black was while he was being tracked, and not alerting the authorities) to a life sentence in Azkaban. Despite the believable 'stories' coming from both Black and Lupin, the judge still found reason to convict them: "I just don't see how a large group of trusted wizards and witches witnesses can be wrong. They all saw the same thing: Sirius Black killed Peter Pettigrew." Despite the fact that both Black and Lupin said Peter is an Animagus and transformed into a rat to escape Black's curse, there is no evidence to support that claim. Their life sentence begins today, no visitors are allowed.

The cold blood that Harry felt inside him before now started boiling. How could they do that? Sirius was the only adult that Harry could confide in, tell everything to. What was he going to do? What was he going to do? He couldn't live his life without Sirius, as odd as it sounded, he needed him. Suddenly, Harry had an idea. A insane, crazy idea that could not work... or could it?

"Where is it?" asked Harry quietly. Ron and Hermione looked at him in question.

"Where is... where is what Harry?" asked Hermione. He looked at her coldly.

"Where is Azkaban?" he asked slowly. They other two looked at him curiously, and then their eyes widened with realization of what he was suggesting.

"You- you want to... rescue them from there?" asked Ron slowly.

"Yes, Ron, I do. I don't think innocent people deserve to have their minds sucked out, do you?" asked Harry impatiently.

"No, of course not Harry, it's just that... well... how are we-" Ron was cut off.

"Don't you understand!" yelled Harry, causing some people to look at him. "It doesn't matter if we can, or if we can't! We have to try!"

"Why though Harry?" asked Ron. "I mean, I know Sirius is your godfather, and Lupin was a great teacher, but why do we have to risk getting killed to try and rescue them? I mean, there's almost no chance that it would work."

How could Harry respond without telling them the truth, without telling them about the Order of the Phoenix? He had to, there was no other way around it. If he was ever going to see his mom again, and keep Voldemort from getting to her, Sirius and Lupin had to be rescued. Harry gave a deep sigh, then spoke. For the next few minutes, he told them the

history of the Order, just as Mrs. Figg had told him, and the fact that he, Sirius, Arabella, and Lupin were in it. He did, however, leave out the part of him stealing Fawkes.

At the end of Harry's story, both Ron and Hermione were staring at Harry with concern, anger, and fear. Ron spoke first,

"How come you're just telling this to us now Harry?" he asked.

"Because they told me not to! You two are the only people, outside of the Order, to ever know about it." Hermione sighed,

"Well, Harry, I see your point. We do have to try and rescue Sirius and Lupin. With your mom on You-Know-Who's side... he'll be even more powerful. If we don't do something, no one will, that is, no one except You-Know-Who."

"Well, I guess you're right," said Ron.

"Alright, it settled then," said Harry, "we will try and rescue them. The only question that remains is... how are we going to do it?" Ron and Hermione looked at each other.

"Well," said Hermione, "we have to first create a distraction here and leave. Then, we have to somehow get to Azkaban. After that, break in, rescue them both, and get back here before anyone catches us. All the while, prevent anyone from knowing that we have left Hogwarts." Harry's smile quickly faded. The more Hermione went on about the plan, the more hopeless it seemed.

"Well the distraction part's easy," said Ron. "All we need to do is get everyone inside one room, and then scare them away. And, when's the next time that everyone's going to be in the same room at once?" he asked Harry and Hermione, appearing to already know the answer.

"The Halloween feast!"

"But Ron," said Harry, "the feast is just a little less than a month away. By then, Sirius and Lupin could be going insane, or they could have gone insane! We need to do it as soon as possible!"

"No Harry," said Hermione, "we should wait. For one, we do need everyone to be in one place, and the Halloween Feast is the closest. Even now, for breakfast, not everyone's down here. Some are early for class, others are sleeping, and teachers are spread all over the place. Also, we need time to form a plan, and we need to wait a while so that the ministry's security isn't as tight around Sirius and Lupin. After a few days of being in Azkaban, your mind starts to go, and you don't need guards anymore." Harry was about to argue, but he thought better of himself, and knew that she was right.

By the time their conversation was over, the bell had rung for their first class (Care of Magical Creatures) and Harry didn't have time to confront Tci.... During breakfast anyway...

It was a very exciting class: almost everybody's egg hatched, and everyone got their first glimpse of a newborn dragon. Even though they weren't especially... cute, there was a special aura around them that made all the kids love them.

When the bell rang, Hagrid collected them up, and Harry decided this would be a good time to talk to Tci. Harry ran up to him, and tapped him on the shoulder. Tci turned around, looking ecstatic.

"Harry!" he said. "How are you-" he was cut off.

"What do you think you're doing Tci?" asked Harry angrily. Tci looked shocked.

"What? What do you mean?" he asked, looking taken aback.

"You know, Tci, you saw me!" Harry yelled.

"Saw you... doing... what? Where? What are you talking about Harry?" Tci asked. He looked as though he was on the verge of tears.

"You mean... you didn't send me a note saying you saw me... well, did you?!"

"No, of course not Harry!" said Tci. "I would never do anything like that!" Harry looked at Tci, and he couldn't help but trust him.

"Well then, what were you doing last night by Dumbledore's office?" asked Harry. Tci's sadness suddenly turned to an expression of seriousness.

"What? Oh, that! I was... going to see Dumbledore. See, at Durmstrang, we take a Curses class, and I had a few questions for him on whether or not I'd be continuing that. But, I didn't know a password was necessary to enter so, I left soon afterwards." Harry stared at Tci for a second, but then he smiled at him.

"Alright Tci, I believe you," said Harry.

"But, Harry, what note did you get?" asked Tci curiously.

"Oh, uh, no... I was just joking about that. Just wanted to know what you were doing last night. Oh no, class is about to start, I gotta go Tci! See ya later!" yelled Harry as he ran back to the castle.

"Hey Harry! How did you know I was there? I didn't see you!" yelled Tci as Harry ran. Harry pretended not to hear him.

As Harry headed to his next class, the note stayed in his mind. If Tci didn't write it, who did? Who else could have possibly seen him? As he was spacing out and walking, he slammed right into someone.

"Oh! Sorry!" said Harry as papers, quills, books, and ink flew everywhere. He squatted down, and started scrambling to help pick everything up when he looked up, and saw who he had run into. Harry's face went dark red. He had bumped into Cho Chang, the girl whom Harry had a crush on ever since he'd first seen her. He had asked her to the dance last year, but she went with Cedric Diggory instead. Ever since then, he hadn't spoken to her much, except for now.

"Oh, Cho! I'm so sorry!" Harry was working twice as fast to pick up the stuff.

"Oh Harry, it's okay. I wasn't looking and—" she said before Harry cut her off.

"No no, I wasn't looking and—"

"Harry!" said Cho, slightly loud. "It's okay. Calm down!" She squatted down next to him, and started picking up stuff too.

"I'm sorry Cho," repeated Harry, feeling more embarrassed now than he had ever been before in his life. "It's all my fault!"

"No Harry," said Cho nicely, "it is my fault. I walked into you on purpose." She smiled, and Harry stopped picking up stuff for a minute.

"What? Why?"

"Well, Harry. Because.... I like you. Last year, I didn't want to ask you to the dance because... well... I thought you'd think I was just liking you because you were the school champion, not just because of who you are." She smiled again, and Harry's jaw dropped, and his heart skipped a beat. The final warning bell rang, but Harry didn't care. This conversation was worth a thousand History of Magic classes.

"You mean... all this time... you.... liked me?" asked Harry, still in disbelief.

"Yeah Harry, that's right," said Cho. She seemed to be looking a little nervous, like she didn't know what to say.

"Well, um uh, you want to... uh, do something sometime?" asked Harry.

"Sure!" said Cho excitedly. "How about tonight, after the Quidditch match? We can go to Hogsmeade and see a movie."

"Okay," said Harry as fast as he could without thinking, still in a state of disbelief.

“Great!” she said. She stood up, and waved her wand. All of her stuff on the floor magically sorted itself, and flew into her arms, “I’ll see you then Harry! Oh, and congratulations of becoming a prefect!” Harry stared at her as she ran down the hallway, still in shock of what had occurred.... Then he suddenly remembered that he was late for his History of Magic!

Harry ran there as fast as he could. It didn’t take him long to get there, though, since he was already almost there, and there were no other people in the hallway. When he burst through the large doors to his class, everyone stared at him, including Professor Binns, their teacher. He looked absolutely crazed. His hair was flying all over the place, and he was zooming all over the room (he was a ghost after all). His hands were gripping his head, and when he saw Harry, he yelled.

“Harry Potter! What do you think you’re doing! Never, in all of my years teaching, has a single student ever been late!” As he spoke, tiny flecks of ghostly saliva shot from his mouth all over Harry. “I hope you have a good reason for this young man!”

“Oh... um... yes... professor,” stuttered Harry. His mind was racing, he had to think of an excuse that wouldn’t mention Cho. “Well, you see, my dragon egg just hatched today... and... um... Hagrid needed to show me how to... uh... take good care of it.” Harry’s lie was almost true, his egg did hatch today, and hopefully Professor Binns wouldn’t ask Hagrid if he had asked him to stay later. Harry waited in silence for Professor Binns’ response. It appeared as though he had bought the lie since his anger faded, and he merely pointed at Harry’s seat and said, “Sit.”

Harry took his seat, and put his head down on his desk. History of Magic was by far his most boring subject, and it seemed to go on forever. As Professor Binns droned on and on about how the Ministry of Magic started, Harry felt sleep coming on. Suddenly, Ron put up his hand. Professor Binns looked shocked: apparently, not many students asked him questions. Harry sat up to witness this rare event.

“Yes, um, Mr. Weasley. What is it?” Professor Binns asked dully.

“Professor, ” asked Ron, “I was wondering, could you tell us a little bit about the history of Azkaban?” Harry and Hermione’s heads shot up from the table while the rest of the class’ stayed down. They were all expecting just another boring speech.

“Well, uh, Mr. Weasley, you see... Azkaban was built in 1027AD. It was originally a place where Hogwarts students went for punishment and-” he was cut off by Hermione.

“But where is it located Professor?” she asked. Professor Binns looked on the verge of another death. Today, not only did a student arrive late, but he was asked two questions! There must be something in the water.... After he took a second to calm down, he floated behind his desk, reached up above it, and pulled down a large map.

It was a great map, thought Harry. If he had known about it, he would've asked Professor Binns if he could use it during every lesson. It was not a flat Muggle map, but it was a three dimensional map that showed the entire world. Each place was clearly labeled, and the water was flowing. Clouds were moving above the land, and Harry could even see some lights coming from some places that contained buildings.

Professor Binns took out a long pointing stick, and pointed to a location on the map Harry couldn't make out. The map, seeming to realize this, rotated, and zoomed in on the place Professor Binns was pointing. Harry saw that it was a map of England. Hogwarts was near the bottom, and at the top was a black dot with the writing 'Azkaban' next to it. Harry saw many rivers, forests, and miles between the two.

When Harry just about had the map memorized, Professor Binns let his pointer off the map, and it zoomed out again. He floated to the front of his desk again, and the map went back up into some invisible container.

"I hope that answered your question Miss. Granger," said Professor Binns, sarcastically. He started going on about the founding of the Ministry of Magic again, and Harry felt tired once again.

"Hopefully Ron or Hermione memorized the map," thought Harry as he fell asleep. He woke up minutes later to the loud ringing sound of the bell, and ran to meet Ron and Hermione.

"Do you remember the map?" asked Harry.

"No need to," said Hermione. She reached into her pocket, and pulled out a small camera. "I got a picture of it. We'll need the map when we set off."

"Harry, why were you late?" asked Ron curiously. Harry went red, and told them how he had bumped into Cho. Hermione giggled throughout the whole thing. Ron just spoke at the end.

"Well, good luck with her Harry," said Ron. "She's a year older than you, so you'll need it,"

"Yeah, thanks," said Harry. Then, looking at his watch, remembered their Quidditch game tonight.

"Hey Ron, we have to get changed and get out to the field, our game is in an hour!" They said goodbye to Hermione, and ran back to their room while Hermione set out for the Quidditch field to get a good seat.

Harry and Ron raced back to the Gryffindor common room, and ran to their room. Where they changed into their Quidditch robes. Ron was incredibly nervous, just as Harry was before his first game.

“It’s okay Ron,” Harry reassured Ron. “I was nervous before my fist game, but remember, I won!”

“Yeah, yeah,” responded Ron, “but at least you had a few days to practice beforehand.” He was right, though, thought Harry. They didn’t even have one practice session with Ron as their Keeper, whereas they had many practice session when Harry was the new Seeker on the team.

“But Ron,” said Harry, “you’ve been practicing all summer long.” Ron finally pulled his Quidditch robes over his head, and grabbed his broom.

“Yeah Harry, you’re right,” said Ron. He started heading down the stairs from the room, and to the field. Harry followed him excitedly. This would be his first actual Quidditch game in over a year, and the first time he’d be playing as captain.

Before he knew it, he was down at one end of the field with Ron, Fred, George, Angelina, Alicia, and Katie. Fred and George were pacing back and forth, the girls were each biting their nails. Harry thought it was time for a little inspirational speech, like Oliver Wood used to do.

“Everyone!” said Harry loudly, to get their attention. The rest of the team looked at him and Harry started a speech, making it up as he went along, “All I’ve got to say is... we’ve got the best team in this whole school and... we’re going to win! Really, there’s nothing else to say, we are the best!”

They all clapped to this pathetic speech, and heard the announcement for the teams to come out. As the walked out, they saw the Hufflepuff team; they were clad in canary-yellow robes, and looking very nervous. Last year, they lost their captain (Cedric Diggory) and without him, they were significantly hurt.

Harry walked to the center of the field to shake hands with their new captain. When he saw who it was, he smiled. It was Justin Finch-Fletchley. He was a boy who was an acquaintance of Harry’s, never really his friend. They shook hands.

“How’d you become captain Justin? I mean, you weren’t even on the team.”

“Well, I tried out for the team this year, and since no one else stepped up to the position as captain, I volunteered, and everyone said okay!” He looked very excited as he mounted his broom, a Cleansweep Eight. It was the Cleansweep company’s latest attempt to make a better broom than the Firebolt. However, it was a vain attempt, as Harry’s Firebolt was far superior.

“Teams! Mount your brooms!” Lee Jordan’s voice boomed over the entire field. He was the announcer for the game. Harry swung his leg over his broom, and he saw Justin and the rest of the Hufflepuff team do the same.

“On my mark! One... two....” Madame Hooch (the Quidditch teacher) let the Bludger and the Snitch out of the box.

“Three! Go!” Madame Hooch threw the Quaffle in the air and Katie immediately dived up for it. It was in her arms within a second. Harry zoomed out of the way to let the Chasers do their work and started circling the field, looking for the Snitch. As most of the game was heading for the Hufflepuff goals, Harry flew over to Ron who was flying from the right-most goal to the left one.

“How are you doing, Ron?” yelled Harry.

“Oh, I’m-” Harry never got to hear his response though. Lee Jordan’s voice rang through the field.

“Gryffindor scores! Ten to zero!” The stadium erupted in cheers from every house except Hufflepuff and Slytherin. Harry did, however, see Tci stand up and clap.

“Gotta go Ron! Good luck!” Harry shot off, looking for the Snitch. He saw Justin doing the same, he must also be the Hufflepuff Seeker. Deciding to take advantage of this, Harry flew over to Fred.

“Hey Fred!” yelled Harry.

“What is it Harry?” asked Fred, he was scanning the field for a Bludger to whack at the Hufflepuffs.

“When I put my hand in the air, hit a Bludger towards me!” Fred, though looking confused, said okay. Harry soared over to the opposite end of the field that Justin was on. Pretending he saw the golden Snitch, he flew toward the ground, and put his hand in the air, giving the signal to Fred. Justin, seeing Harry go into the sudden dive, flew towards the same spot as him, hoping to get the Snitch. Harry just hoped Fred had hit the Bludger over to them.

Justin and Harry flew faster toward each other, everything around Harry was a blur. Then, when as he was a few feet away from colliding with Justin, Harry suddenly veered up. Justin stopped suddenly, and looked up to see where Harry was going. As he was hovering there, a Bludger flying at top speed collided with Justin, knocking him out, and causing him to fall to the ground.

Fred flew up to Harry, and gave him a high five.

“Great idea Harry! Now their Seeker is out of the game!” yelled Fred excitedly.

Sure enough, Lee Jordan came over the speaker:

“Oh no! The Hufflepuff Seeker has been knocked out of the game!” The cheers from Ravenclaw and Gryffindor were deafening. Gryffindor had pretty much won the game already since Hufflepuff would be unable to get the Snitch. This didn’t mean, however, that Hufflepuffs couldn’t score a lot of points in the process.

The Hufflepuff Chasers seemed to be thinking along the same lines. One of their Chasers quickly stole the Quaffle from Angelina, and was soaring to the Gryffindor goals. Just as that Chaser flew passed Harry, he saw a glint of gold over by the Gryffindor goal. Harry shot over there, beating the Hufflepuff Chaser by a mile. He zipped all over the place, chasing the shimmer of gold. It was centered around the three goals, going in circles. But, no matter how Harry flew, it seemed to be just a little bit ahead of him. What was going on with it? However, it was moving in a predictable pattern. Harry had another idea on how to get it.

The Hufflepuff Chaser was getting ready to shoot.

“Ron!” yelled Harry. “Hit the Quaffle toward me!” Ron nodded, not looking at Harry, concentrating on the Hufflepuff Chaser. The Chaser threw the Quaffle at the goal, but Ron was too quick for him. He spun around, whacking the Quaffle at Harry..

He ducked at the last second, and the Quaffle went behind him, hitting the Snitch. The Snitch bounced off at an angle right into Harry’s waiting open palm. He wrapped his fingers around the Snitch, and listened as the stands explode in applause.

“Gryffindor wins! One-hundred-sixty to zero!” Lee Jordan’s voice rang out across the entire stadium, though it was barely hearable due to the applause.

Harry landed on the ground, Snitch still in hand, and the rest of the Gryffindor team came over, and lifted him into the air.

“That’s the best victory we’ve ever had!” said Angelina.

“Not to mention one of the quickest!” said Alicia.

“Nice work, deflecting the Snitch right to you Harry!” said Fred. It was one of the happiest days of Harry’s life, and it made him forget all about the crazy Snitch. He had won his first game as captain, and he had slaughtered the other team. As he was basking in his glory, Harry looked over at the Hufflepuff team, slowly walking back to their end of the field. Just as Gryffindor had their greatest and quickest victory, Hufflepuff had their worst and fastest loss.

As Harry watched them walked solemnly and slowly off the field, sad thoughts came to his mind: Sirius and Lupin were in jail, and he, Ron, and Hermione would have to rescue them. What if they failed? What if they were forced to stay in Azkaban? Then Harry tried to set his mind on happier things: He’d be with his mom soon, and he’d never have to be

with the Dursleys ever again... even though he wouldn't mind staying with just Dudley. And best of all, he'll be going out with Cho later....

That's right, Harry thought. He had to get ready to go to Hogsmeade with Cho! He jumped off the hands of his teammates, and ran over to Ron and Hermione who were down on the field.

"Great job there Harry," said Ron.

"Yeah, thanks," said Harry, panting. "I have to get ready to go to Hogsmeade."

"Alright," said Ron. He and Harry walked back up to the Gryffindor common room and up to their room. Harry changed into his dress robe, an emerald green version of his school robes.

"Now Harry, don't stay out too late and be careful!" said Ron sarcastically.

"Ha ha," said Harry weakly.

"But seriously, just be careful Harry," said Ron, putting his hand on Harry's shoulder. "You're my best friend, and... there's just something about Cho that-". Harry cut him off.

"Don't worry Ron! I'll be fine!" said Harry, looking at himself in the mirror. Once he was satisfied with how he looked, he walked out of his room with Ron saying good-bye, and then back to the common room, trying to avoid as many fans of his victory as possible. Harry, however, was no match for the Creevey brothers. Colin and Dennis ran up to him, and didn't stop congratulating Harry until he walked out the door. Apparently, they had gotten back their obsessive liking of him.

As he left the room, and started on his way down the stairs, to the Great Hall, a thought came to him: he didn't know where the Ravenclaw common room was. Harry started to panic, what if Cho thought he didn't come because he didn't like her? Just as he was starting to really worry, he heard footsteps coming down the hallway. Harry walked over to see who it was, and to his relief, it was Cho.

She was looking especially pretty tonight, dressed in a shorter silver robe that went up to a little above her knees. Her hair seemed longer, and it was a darker blonde than it usually was. Harry felt almost ugly next to her, he hadn't bothered to change anything except his robes. Now that he was thinking about it, he should've at least combed his hair a little more. Cho, however, looked indifferent to Harry's appearance. She smiled and walked over to him.

"Hello Harry!" she said, smiling. "Shall we?" she extended her arm to Harry, and he took it. They started walking toward the door out of the castle when Harry had another

thought: how were they going to get to Hogsmeade? Just as before when Harry was worried about how he was going to meet Cho, he felt panicked again.

As they got closer and closer to the door, Harry's fear rose. Did she expect him to have something ready? Were they going to walk? They arrived at the door, and Cho pushed it open. Just as before, an enormous feeling of relief came over Harry.

There was a giant broom outside. It was at least fifteen feet long, and definitely not for playing Quidditch. At the tip, there was a small wizard dressed in a blue suit, with a square blue hat on his head. He waved a white gloved hand at Harry and Cho, and she led Harry onto the broom. He sat behind the blue-clad wizard, and Cho sat behind Harry, her hands on his waist.

"Where to kids?" asked the driving wizard. He had a friendly voice, and it made Harry feel less nervous and more confident.

"Hogsmeade," said Harry. They shot up in the air, and Cho squeezed his sides. They flew through the air at a fast speed, and Harry saw that they were definitely not taking the shortest route. He had been to Hogsmeade many times before, and they were not following the quick way that the Hogwarts students followed. This was probably just a technique to extend the pleasure of the evening, thought Harry.

Even though they didn't take the shortest path, it didn't seem like a long time before they did arrive at Hogsmeade. They landed, and after Harry and Cho got off, the long broom shot off again, just as fast as when Harry and Cho first got on it.

"Let's go in Harry," said Cho, still smiling. Harry spun around, still looking at the sky for the broom, and saw the theater. Harry's first thought was: this was no Muggle theater. It was at least half a mile long, and half a mile high. It was covered in flashing lights of every color, and searchlights came out from everywhere on the top. As Harry looked around even more, he saw that he and Cho were by far not the only people there. There were people of every age around the entrance of the theater. Harry recognized a few students that were there, and there were some wizard and witch couples there that looked like they were just as old as Dumbledore.

Cho pulled Harry in the direction of what appeared to be the door to get in. It didn't look like a door at all though, it looked like a pool of water that had somehow been turned sideways, and attached to the side of the building. Harry walked closer to it, gaping while Cho pulled him slightly towards it. Cho stopped when she got in front of the 'door'.

"Two tickets for um... what do you want to see Harry?" asked Cho nicely. Harry looked around the door, and saw magical posters for each of the movies. Harry knew which one he'd like to see: Blood Quidditch VII, the Devil's Broom. It looked like a very exciting version of Harry's favorite sport. However, remembering that he was here with Cho, looked at the other posters and decided on something else.

"Um... how about... Eternal Adoration," he said. Cho smiled at him.

"Two for Eternal Adoration please," she said to the door. It turned from a blue color to a red.

"That will be one galleon and ten sickles please," said the door. As it spoke, it rippled, a cool little effect. Cho reached inside her pocket. Harry, who had anticipated something like this, spoke,

"No, Cho, no," said Harry, grabbing a hold of her hand, and taking it out of her pocket. "I've got it covered." Harry took out two galleons from his pants pocket, and as soon as he took them out, a piece of the door extended like an arm, and took them out of his hand. The arm flowed back into the main door, and the galleons disappeared. Seven sickles then appeared inside the door, and it extended back out with the sickles in hand. Harry put them in his pocket.

"Thank you, you may enter now," said the door. It turned from red to a yellow, and Cho stepped through. When she appeared unhurt, Harry did the same. As he was walking through, it felt like he was moving through some sort of hard water. It was a nice tickling feeling, and Harry had to control himself from laughing.

When he appeared on the other side, Cho took his hand and started leading him to a door. Even though the outside was not like a Muggle theater at all, the inside was exactly like one. It wasn't very bright inside, and there were a few concession stands. There were even bathrooms. There were also massive doors everywhere, with labels above them for the movies that were inside. Harry and Cho walked over to the door for their movie, and Harry opened the door for Cho, letting her through. They stepped through into what, thought Harry, looked exactly like a Muggle theater. There were seats all over the room that got higher every row, and there was a massive screen in front of them all.

Most of the theater was already filled up with other couples, so Harry and Cho walked over to a row that was close to the back. The second Harry sat down, a neat thing happened: a small cup of soda appeared on his right arm rest. Harry looked over, and saw that the same had happened to Cho.

Just as he was about to ask her how that happened, the lights inside the theater dimmed, and the screen lit up. Harry leaned over, to ask Cho if she'd heard anything about this movie. Then, just when his face was next to hers, an even more unexpected thing happened than the food and drinks coming up from the chair.

Cho kissed him.

If Harry thought the feeling of winning the Quidditch game was great, it was nothing compared to this. She hadn't given him a little peck on the cheek, she got him right on the lips. Harry's eyes became wide, and he saw Cho with her eyes closed. Harry's first instinct was to run away, but as he was sitting there, he started to get over the initial

shock of it. As Cho continued, Harry's heart beat faster and faster, and he was feeling warm inside. Then, Harry felt Cho slowly drawing back, and she sat back in her chair.

"You okay Harry?" she asked. He just realized that he still had his face out, and eyes closed. Harry quickly opened his eyes, and sat back in his chair.

"Oh, yeah. I'm good," said Harry. He had experienced such a wonderful feeling before in his life. It was as if someone had used the complete polar opposite of the Cruciatus Curse on him: a spell that spread pleasure throughout your entire body.

Harry tried to look cool about it, and reached for his soda, when he felt Cho's hand on his arm. He looked over at her, and she was smiling. Harry leaned forward, and they kissed again, exactly as before, only longer this time.

"I really like you Harry," she said when they had stopped. Was she serious? This seemed to good to be true, thought Harry. But, was she just looking for another boyfriend since Cedric died? Harry suddenly felt angry at himself, for thinking such a thing.

Cho and Harry just sat there, watching the movie for the next few minutes. Harry pretended to be enjoying it, though he couldn't even pretend to like it as much as Cho. She was constantly weeping, and crying over the film. Harry looked forward to these crying moments, though. When they were both sitting there, silent, the tension was unbearable. Should he act on her, or should he wait for her? These thoughts raced through Harry's mind during these periods of intense quietness.

Then, just when Cho stopped another one of her cryings, Harry couldn't take it any longer. He put his hand on her cheek, and he pulled her face over to his. Amazed by his bravery, Harry smiled. Cho took this smiling as a sign, and the put her face out as well. They both leaned their heads closer together, and embraced in a kiss. This one, however, seemed to last forever. Harry's head was spinning the entire time, he was in a state of bliss.

What seemed like an eternity later, Harry and Cho receded their heads, and sat back. When Harry looked up at the screen, he saw that the credits were rolling, and almost everyone else in the theater had left, except for a few others that were currently engaged in what he and Cho had just finished doing, and were oblivious to everything. Harry and Cho sat up, and walked out hand in hand.

When they stepped out of the theater, it was pitch black, except for the extremely bright lights all over. The same wizard was waiting outside for them, on the same broom.

"Aw, what a cute couple," he said as Harry helped Cho onto the broom, though she needed none. Once Harry and Cho was secured, the broom took off again, soaring through the sky. "I hope you had a fun night."

"You have no idea," said Harry, feeling the breeze running through his hair, and Cho's hands on his waist. He took in a deep breath, wishing this night would never end. That he and Cho could just ride the broom for the rest of their lives. Despite this wish, however, the broom arrived back at Hogwarts, quicker than the trip there.

Harry and Cho stepped off the broom, and Harry tipped the driving wizard a galleon. The wizard tipped his hat, and smiled to them,

"Good night kids!" he said as he flew away.

Harry and Cho walked up the stairs to the main entrance and then through the giant doors. Once they got to the main staircase that separated into many others, Harry and Cho stopped in their tracks. They turned around and faced each other, and Harry took Cho's other hand, now holding onto both.

"Thanks Cho," said Harry. "I had a great time."

"No, thank you Harry," said Cho. "You know, all summer, I was grieving over Cedric. But, finally, I told myself that he was gone, and crying and mourning over him would not bring him back. So, I decided it was time to move on." She smiled at Harry as he stood there. "You know Harry, I've always liked you, and well, I guess... well... thanks for tonight Harry. I really needed to get out." She bent over slightly, and gave Harry a kiss. She let go of his arms, and then ran off to the Ravenclaw common room.

"See you later Harry! Let's do this again sometime!" she said as she ran. Harry just stood there for a few seconds, motionless. Then, he jumped up in the air.

"Yahoo!" he yelled as loud as he could, he didn't care if anyone heard him. All he cared about was that he was with Cho, the girl he always wished he was with.

"There's only one thing to do at a time like this," said Harry, tipping an imaginary hat, and taking out an imaginary cane. "Strut!"

Harry strutted all the way up to the Gryffindor room. He stepped in the large crack in the staircase that he usually avoided, but he didn't care. He kept going, pulling at his leg, bringing up a small piece of the stair with his leg, widening the hole slightly.

"Well, well, well!" said the Fat Lady as she saw Harry walk up to her, looking very happy. "Where have you been?"

"Oh... just to the theater..." said Harry, slightly oblivious to everything around him. "Password." The Fat Lady swung the door open, slightly disappointed that she didn't get any more out of him. Harry walked in, and the majority of the Gryffindors were still up: Aylar was performing some new trick which attracted some attention, Fred and George were showing off their latest invention (Harry didn't bother to see what it was) and Ron

and Hermione who were talking together with each other at a table, away from everyone else. Harry ran up to them.

“Hey guys! Wait until I tell you-” Harry was cut off.

“Keep it down Harry!” said Hermione. “Do you want everyone knowing what we’re doing?” She turned back to a colorful piece of paper on the table.

“Well, that depends, what are you doing?” asked Harry curiously.

“Trying to find the best route to Azkaban!” said Ron.

“Oh! That!” said Harry. During the past few hours, everything about Sirius and Lupin and Azkaban melted away from his brain. “Yeah, how’s that coming?” Ron glared at Harry.

“Very well thank you,” he said. Harry sat down next to them, and looked at the map. It was the photo Hermione took. There were marks all over it. Apparently, Ron and Hermione had been arguing over the best route there.

“This is not going to be an easy trip,” said Hermione, putting her hand to her forehead. “Even the shortest and easiest route contains more obstacles than inside the Forbidden Forest!” She sighed, and buried her head into her folded arms. Just then, Ron’s face lit up.

“I’ve got it!” he said. “Hermione! That’s it, the Forbidden Forest! I know how we can make a distraction that will get rid of everyone!”

“How?” asked Harry and Hermione together, each looking very surprised that Ron came up with an answer before them.

“We’ll use one of the creatures in the forest, Aragog!” said Ron, putting his hand in the air. Hermione had an expression of confusion, but Harry looked excited.

“Just one look at him in the Great Hall, and we’ll have the entire school running all the way to Mexico!” said Harry excitedly.

“Who is... Aragog?” asked Hermione. She hadn’t been with Ron and Harry during their second year at Hogwarts, when they went into the Forbidden Forest, she was too busy being petrified. There, they encountered a giant spider named Aragog, who wanted to eat Harry and Ron.

“Yeah, okay. One more question... how exactly are we going to get it out of the forest, much less into the school?” Hermione asked. Harry and Ron looked at each other, puzzled. Sure, Aragog was the perfect beast for the job, but how would they get him in? Harry yawned over the thought.

“Hey Ron, what time is it?”

“Um... eleven thirty,” said Ron, looking at his watch. Just then, an idea came to Harry’s mind. He knew how to get Aragog into the school!

“Ron, spiders are afraid of basilisks, right?” asked Harry slowly.

“Yeah... so? It’s not like we have a pet basilisk anywhere though.”

“No, but we do have something else!” said Harry as he left a confused Ron and Hermione at the table, and ran back to his room. He grabbed the watch that Dudley had given him and ran back downstairs. Held up his watch for Hermione and Ron to see. His watch was in the shape of a basilisk, the thing that all spiders feared the most.

“All we got to do is put an Engorgio Charm on this watch’s face, and then chase them right into the Great Hall!” Hermione and Ron looked at him.

“Harry, so many things could go wrong-” Hermione was cut off by Harry:

“So!? This is just a small part of the even more impossible trip Hermione! If you can’t stand up to a spider, how are you going to fare against an army of dementors, sucking the happiness out of you?” Hermione nodded. This was the only way. Aragog was the closest monster, and this was the only way to bring him in.

“So it’s settled then,” said Harry. “Before the Halloween Feast, we’ll all meet outside the Forbidden Forest, and chase the giant spider inside the castle.” Ron and Hermione nodded in approval. “Now, show me the best route to get to Azkaban.” Ron and Hermione shook their heads.

“Not until you tell us how it went tonight,” said Ron, with a smile on his face. Harry put his hands in his pockets, licked his lips, and told them about his date with Cho, with Ron and Hermione’s mouth gaping open the entire time.

## **Chapter 12- Transformation Training**

The next day, Harry was anxious to get on with their plan. Even though Halloween was still a few weeks away, Harry couldn't help but think about it, while having the same thing continually cross his mind: how are they going to get in Azkaban? Harry assumed that they wouldn't just be able to walk in, go to Sirius and Lupin's cell, and let them go. They had to think of a way to do it. Harry proposed this question to Ron and Hermione during Transfiguration,

"So how do you reckon we can do it?" he asked them. Hermione stroked her chin thoughtfully, while Ron just stared at him, as though expecting Harry to give him the answer.

"Well... we could... but... no. It'd take to long and..." said Hermione, inspiring interest in Harry and Ron.

"What's your idea Hermione?" asked Ron. She sighed, looking as though she wished she hadn't said anything.

"Well," said Hermione, "we could follow in your dad's footsteps Harry." Harry's face lit up.

"Of course!" said Harry excitedly. "We can become Animagi!" His father, Lupin, Sirius, and Peter Pettigrew had each become Animagi during their years at Hogwarts. They were each able to transform into an animal.

"Yes, but Harry, it takes many months, even years to become one! It took your dad almost his entire time at Hogwarts to become one!" said Hermione, trying to take Harry off the idea.

"Well, they didn't have proper teachers, or help to do it. All they had was each other and books to learn it," said Harry.

"So what are you saying?" asked Ron. "We enlist the help of a teacher?"

"Yes Ron, that is what I'm saying," said Harry. He looked at Hermione, who now looked excited.

"That's it! Of course! If we get proper help, we could probably become Animagi quickly. We may even have it down in five or six months--" she was cut off by Harry.

"Five or six month! But we have to do this in--" Harry suddenly realized that the entire class was looking at him. He wasn't exactly surprised though, if someone else had been going on as loud as he was, he'd be looking at them.

“Do you have something to share with the rest of us Mr. Potter?” asked Professor McGonagall who was busy transfiguring a fish into a turtle.

“Um... no professor,” said Harry. Professor McGonagall looked at him suspiciously for a second, then returned to her work, and Harry returned to talking with Ron and Hermione.

“But Hermione, we need something that will get us into Azkaban,” said Harry, much softer than before.

“Well, we’ll just need another plan for that,” she said, listening more to Professor McGonagall, and taking many notes. Ron, however, was looking slightly disappointed.

“Too bad, for a second there, I thought I might learn to do something that only I, not any of my other brothers, could do.” Harry and Hermione looked at him sympathetically.

“Well, even if we can’t use it to get into Azkaban, it would still be an invaluable technique to have, especially when we’re all Aurors,” said Harry. Ron’s face brightened up, and Hermione looked at him.

“You do realize that this will take months, maybe even years of work and practice, and we’ve got tests coming up soon and-”

“No it won’t Hermione,” said Harry. “Not with McGonagall teaching us!” All three of them looked up at Professor McGonagall in a new light.

“Well, it might be nice to know more about it, it could help me on the O.W.L.s,” said Hermione, trying to hide the fact that she really wanted to do this.

The rest of the class went by slowly, and Harry’s anxiousness to get started was getting higher. By the time the bell actually rang, Harry was gripping the front of his desk, with his eyes bulging out.

“Ah, finally!” said Ron, he had been waiting too. When the rest of the class had left, Harry, Ron, and Hermione headed up to Professor McGonagall who was busy grading some papers.

“Um, professor...” stuttered Harry. He hadn’t thought about how he was going to start this conversation.

“Yes Mr. Potter?” asked Professor McGonagall. She peered up at him through her half-circle glasses that were on the tip of her nose.

“Well, we... that is... me, Ron, and Hermione have been wondering if... well you could train us to... well....”

“Become Animagi, Mr. Potter?” she asked, not looking at him, but putting grades on papers. Harry’s jaw dropped, how had she known that? Could she read minds? Harry had suspected for a while that many of the teachers here were able to do that, but he’d never suspected Professor McGonagall... until now.

“Yes, that’s it. How did you know?” he asked, feeling relieved that he wouldn’t be the one to bring it up. She took her glasses off, set them on the table, and then rubbed her eyes.

“I expected that you’d be paying more attention to your godfather’s trial Harry,” she said. “to defend himself, he admitted to being an Animagus, and Lupin backed him up saying that he, Peter, and James had each become one.” She put her glasses back on. “I knew, eventually, that you’d be coming to ask me. The urge to be an Animagus has been passed down to you from your father, who got it from his father, who got it from his.”

“You mean, my grandfather, and my great-grandfather have all been Animagi?” asked Harry, dumbfounded that he never knew this. However, he had never known anything about any of his family past his mother and father, except for those currently in the Order of the Phoenix.

“Yes Harry,” said Professor McGonagall, she put her glasses back on, “It was only a matter of time before the urge overcame you. As for you two though (she pointed to Ron and Hermione) I did not expect you at all. I am assuming that you are following Mr. Potter?”

“Yes, I thought it could help me for the O.W.L.s,” said Hermione.

“And I thought it’d be great to be able to do something my brothers, or my sister, couldn’t,” said Ron. Professor McGonagall, however, looked furious at them.

“Becoming an Animagus is not something to be taken lightly you two!” she scolded Ron and Hermione. “It should not be utilized to help you pass a test, or to show off! It is magic at its finest, its most difficult! It is not to be taken lightly at all!” she glared at them both, Hermione looked shocked, she was rarely ever talked to harshly, much less scolded, by a teacher. Ron, however, was used to this sort of thing, and looked unaffected.

“Well, professor, I think it would help me a lot to have some others work on this project along with me,” said Harry, trying to save Ron and Hermione. McGonagall appeared to have accepted that.

“Yes, I suppose it would help you, Potter. Having two others to help you along would be very valuable. Yes, that is a good idea,” she said to all three of them. “Meet me here at seven tonight, we will begin your training. It will be long and vigorous work, and if any of you want to drop out of it, I will not be surprised. Many wizards, while extremely wise in one or more other areas, are unable to become Animagi.”

“We know professor, but we won’t give up,” said Harry. Professor McGonagall looked pleased

“Alright then, don’t be late! Now go, I’ve got another class coming in!” she shooed them off as her new class filed their way inside. Harry saw that they were the Slytherins. Hoping to leave before Malfoy came in, Harry sprinted out the door. Unfortunately, he crashed into someone.

“Watch it Potter! You’re like a brick... only the brick has more brains,” said Malfoy after Harry bumped into him.

“Move it Malfoy,” said Harry disdainfully.

“What are you doing, staying late Potter? Catching up on some work? Begging McGonagall to give you a better grade?”

“Sorry Malfoy, already got good grades. I didn’t get this prefect badge by buying one with money from my rich father,” said Harry as he slid past Malfoy, and to his next class.

Harry walked triumphantly to Defense Against the Dark Arts with Ron and Hermione, each looking forward to their Animagus lessons. The class started going by quickly, with everyone finishing up perfecting their shield spells. By the middle of class, Harry could produce a shield that deflected all the hexes that Mrs. Figg tested on them. Once each of them had been tested and passed, she made an announcement.

“Everyone, I have an announcement about... your learning schedule.” All the students in the class looked at her with interest. “I know that we’re supposed to be moving on to more advanced shields now, but Dumbledore had just informed me that he wants to go a bit more... ahead.” Now everyone in the class was gazing right at Mrs. Figg, wondering what they were going to do next.

“How many of you have ever felt extreme pain?” she asked the class. Everyone started at her confusedly, but a few people put their hands in the air, in fact, almost everyone did, including Harry. He had his bones grown overnight, had his scar burn, and been hit by the Cruciatus Curse twice.

“Now, among you that have your hand up, how many have felt pain so extreme that you wanted it to all just end, just to die?” Everyone was looking at her very seriously now, and everyone that had their hand up, put it down... except for Harry. Mrs. Figg looked at him.

“Mr. Potter, you are the only one in this class... this entire school perhaps who can answer this question. What was it like to have the Cruciatus Curse put on you?” Now all the eyes shifted to Harry. He was feeling very nervous. He had tried to block those memories out of his mind and now that they were flooding back, Harry felt like he was being put through the curse all over again.

“Well, it felt like... felt like... I guess it’s like when you break a leg, only breaking every part of your body at once,” Harry stopped there, thinking he was done, but, he felt as though this didn’t show how bad the curse was, so he continued. “And then having hot pokers put all over you, and being jabbed with spears, and then being slit open with a dagger and having your intestines fall out, and then having them tied to a pole, and that... that’s only the beginning...” Harry now stopped, with everyone gawking at him, including Hermione and Ron. He had never told them how bad the curse really was. Even Mrs. Figg was looking at him in surprise,

“Well, Harry. What I am trying to get at is, wouldn’t you have liked to be able to shut off the flow of pain to your head?” Harry started at her, this question had a very obvious answer.

“Well, yeah,” said Harry.

“Of course you would! It would have helped you greatly!” Mrs. Figg slammed her fist on the desk loudly. “Come on Harry, you can give me more of an answer than ‘yeah’. To be able to turn off the pain would’ve been a godsend.” Harry could only nod in response, it was only too true.

“And that’s what I’m going to teach you all to do,” said Mrs. Figg. Each student was looking at her appreciatively, as though they never wanted to go through what Harry had. “Under the certain current... circumstances... Dumbledore has thought it important to start teaching you all how to do this. It will require much patience and skill, it takes as much intelligence to do this as it does to become an Animagus...” she said and looked at Harry. Did she know Harry was trying to become one? Well, Harry didn’t care. He knew what these ‘circumstances’ were... Voldemort rising. Harry would be more than happy to learn this skill.

“We will start today, and hopefully, by the end of the term, you will all be able to voluntarily shut off pain,” Mrs. Figg said to the class. Each looked more ready than ever to begin. “To start off, I want each of you to come up, and get a PainBall. We will start with these first then move on to... more advanced techniques.” Harry looked around the class, Neville was whiter than a ghost, he must have been very afraid. Suddenly, he put up his hand.

“Yes Mr. Longbottom?” asked Mrs. Figg.

“Um... you’re not going to... put the Cruciatus Curse on us... are you?” he looked absolutely terrified. Harry knew that both of Neville’s parent’s were tortured with the Cruciatus Curse, and were now in an insane asylum because it had messed up their brains so much. Mrs. Figg looked at him sympathetically, she, along with almost the rest of the wizarding world.

“No Neville, of course not. That curse is illegal to use on humans, and I don’t feel like spending the rest of my life in Azkaban.” Neville looked slightly relieved, though his face

was still white. “Anyway, I want you all to come up and get a PainBall. It will give you a little stinging shock that you will eventually learn to not feel. Come on, come up!” The class started to come up slowly, and reached into the a box that contained the PainBalls.

Harry was the first in line, and looked in the box. It was filled with about twenty small transparent spheres. Each sphere had a dark cloud in the center that was constantly growing and shrinking. Harry bravely put his hand in, and gripped one of the balls. The second he touched it, he felt as though he was stung by a bee in his hand. He quickly receded his hand from the box, wobbling it vigorously, trying to shake the pain off.

“Ow!” was all that Harry could say. Mrs. Figg glared at him.

“Harry! If you could endure the Cruciatus Curse, how come you think this small little PainBall is so bad?”

“Well, it’s just that… I guess I didn’t think that-”

“Exactly!” said Mrs. Figg. “You didn’t think! I will teach you all how to think, how to control your mind, and shut off pain! Harry, this time, when you reach in, and grasp a PainBall, try to concentrate on something else besides the pain.” Harry nodded, somewhat understanding. He reached in again, and just when his hand was about to grasp the ball, he thought of his Quidditch victory against Hufflepuff. How happy everyone was, how happy he was. Then he thought of his date with Cho, and the complete bliss that flowed through his body the entire time he was there. Harry smiled…

“Harry! You did it, excellent job!” said Mrs. Figg. Harry suddenly came out of his catatonic phase, and looked at his hand. He was holding the PainBall, and he didn’t even feel it. However, just as he thought that he was feeling nothing, a sudden stinging pain was sent through his arm.

“Arg!” yelled Harry as he dropped the ball, and rubbed his arm.

“Very good Harry, very good for your first time. I will soon teach you how to transform those happy thoughts into a pain shield that will slow all around and through you. You will be able to stop any and all pain, even when realizing you are being hurt.... Now, I want the rest of you coming up and trying to do like Harry.”

The rest of the class came up to the box, and took a PainBall. Some of them dropped it immediately, like Harry did at first. Ron and Hermione, however, held theirs for a while. Harry wondered what happy memories they were focusing on.

When class ended, Harry, Ron, and Hermione were able to prevent pain for little less than a minute, and the rest of the class could prevent from dropping the ball for a few seconds. The bell rang, and their school day was over. Harry, Ron, and Hermione’s learning, however, was only just beginning. After doing their homework in the Gryffindor

common room, and just playing around for a few hours, they all walked down to Professor McGonagall's office, ready for their first Animagus lesson.

As they walked in, they saw Professor McGonagall. They also saw something, or rather someone, that they did not expect to see there. Harry, Ron, and Hermione's jaws dropped all the way to the floor.

It was Draco Malfoy.

"Hello Potter. So, what kind of animal are you going to be, a bunny? A piglet?" He smiled at all three of them as they walked in, and stood next to Professor McGonagall who appeared to be busy at the moment. Harry took this opportunity to interrogate Malfoy.

"What are you doing here!?" whispered Harry, venomously. Malfoy curled a smile.

"Well, I asked McGonagall what you were doing, staying after class. She said nothing, but then I snuck a peek at her schedule, and saw her write: 'Animagus Lessons: Potter, Weasley, Granger.' So, I asked her what those were about, and asked if I could take the class as well. She looked positively terrified that I knew about the lessons, and just said, 'Okay, meet me here at seven.' So, here I am!" Harry and Malfoy glared at each other.

"I know you're just doing this so that you can try and be better than me Malfoy," said Harry.

"I know you just wanted to becomes an Animagus to one up me, Potter," responded Malfoy. By now, Professor McGonagall had finished her work, and stood up. She looked up at the four of them (more or less glared at Malfoy), and spoke.

"Tonight, we will begin your training as Animagi. This will be very tough training, some wizards think it is not worth the trouble of learning. However, I hope you all will stay with it as it will benefit you in the end, by far worth all the trouble."

"The most difficult part of Animagus transformation is the fact that you cannot use a wand. A wand does not enhance your magic power, however, as is commonly thought. It centralizes your magic. It takes the magical power that is spread throughout your body and puts it all into one area, letting you do more complex magic."

"To do a transformation, you must concentrate on each magical cell in your body individually, and force that one small area to transform, part by part. Your first few transformation will be very... err... choppy. But, eventually, you'll be able to centralize your magical cells yourself, instead of piece by piece, and transform smoothly, though this may take months... even years to master.... Are there any questions before we begin?" asked Professor McGonagall. Malfoy, surprisingly, raised his hand.

"Yes Mr. Malfoy?"

“Why can’t one use a wand when performing an Animagus transformation?” he asked. Professor McGonagall started at him in surprise.

“Well, I thought that would be obvious Mr. Malfoy. Using a wand to perform an Animagus transformation totally defeats the purpose of transforming in this manner. Being an Animagus will help you when you have no wand, or are otherwise handicapped. Now then, are all of you ready to begin?” The four of them nodded.

“All right then,” began Professor McGonagall, “to start, have any of you ever changed parts of your body without the use of a wand?” Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Malfoy each raised their hand.

“Mr. Potter? What have you done?” Harry remembered, from his childhood, that whenever the Dursleys gave him a haircut, they could cut off as much as they wanted but, no matter what, the next day, he would have a bushy head of hair again.

“Well... when I was little, I made my hair grow back when my Aunt and uncle cut it.” said Harry. Professor McGonagall nodded in approval.

“And you, Mr. Weasley?”

“Well... once, my brother, George, hid my favorite teddy be- err... toy... on the highest shelf in our room. I could almost reach it, but I was just a few inches away. So my hand it... just grew a little I guess. George was freaked out afterwards.” Professor McGonagall, once again, nodded with approval, as if testing them to see if they were worthy.

“Now what about you Miss. Granger?” Hermione blushed a little before she spoke:

“Um... this Summer, while I was at Viktor Krum’s mansion, we were both on his couch and he leaned over to- well.... I leaned over to him and all of a sudden my teeth, they grew larger and larger, at least three times their usual size. I eventually did get them back to normal... after a while.” Professor McGonagall once again nodded, though not as much as before. She made up her lack of blushing, however, with a small smile.

“What about you Mr. Malfoy?” asked Professor McGonagall.

“Well, I haven’t ever actually done anything on accident, Professor, but I can do this,” Malfoy put out his hand, stretching his fingers. He closed his eyes, and at first, Harry thought he was imagining it, but Malfoy’s fingernails started to grow. At first it was slow, but then there was a recognizable difference, especially when mayfly’s fingernails were three inches long.

Then, just when Harry thought they couldn’t get any longer, Malfoy’s fingernails shrank back to their original size. He put his hand back down by his side, and then opened his eyes, looking especially proud. Harry knew Malfoy had been practicing earlier, he

obviously didn't want to tell the three of them any embarrassing childhood stories about him transforming himself, he wanted to be a step ahead, and be able to do it then and there.

"Excellent work Mr. Malfoy," said Professor McGonagall, looking quite shocked. "I have never seen a student so young be able to perform such an expert transformation so quickly. I think we can expect excellent things from you... maybe even our first Polymagus..."

"What's a Polymagus?" Harry whispered to Hermione. She was looking pale, and even a little scared.

"What? Oh! A Polymagus... that's a wizard that can transform into many different animals, or one combination of many different animals, not just one like an Animagus," she whispered angrily back to Harry, whose mind was perplexed. "I can't believe he'd be able to do something that I can't!" How could Malfoy be able to do something so difficult? He had never shown any particular talent in any area, much less transfiguration.

"Now, onto practice! Mr. Malfoy has already taken this step, but on a different part of the body than I usually start with. I prefer to start with your fingers. For the next few days, we will try and perfect growing and shrinking them."

"To do this, you will have to concentrate hard. Look at your hands, remember them, memorize every detail: every wrinkle, scar, mark, and cut." Harry looked at his hand, and tried to take in every bit of it. He started at the end of his wrists, and worked his way up to the tips of his fingernails.

"Now, close your eyes, and try to see your hands... only now with longer fingers. Concentrate hard...." Harry closed his eyes, and formed a picture of his hand in his head. He pictured his fingers longer than they were, this new longer-fingered hand of his looked very odd.

"Now, open your eyes!" said Professor McGonagall. Harry opened his eyes, and to his (and apparently Ron, and Hermione's whose hands had done the same) shock, saw his fingers longer than they were by about two inches. Not as long as he had pictured them, but still quite long. Malfoy, however, looked lazily at his longer fingers. He appeared anxious to go beyond this basic step, and onto the more complicated stuff.

"Close your eyes everyone, and picture your hands as they are now. Morph the fingers in your mind, make them back to their original length. After you do, open your eyes." Harry did this, and, sure, enough, when he opened his eyes, his fingers were back to their normal size. Malfoy gave a very fake expression of surprise, slapping his hands against his cheeks, and bugging his eyes out.

“Excellent everyone, excellent! Now, if my watch is correct, it is eight o’ clock, and time for you all to be in your common rooms. We will do this again tomorrow, same place, bright and early.” Harry, Ron, and Hermione all walked out together, talking excitedly.

“Oh, and, start thinking of what kind of animal you will transform into! It is the most important decision you will make as an Animagus!” said Professor McGonagall as they left. Malfoy slipped away from them quickly. Harry thought this odd, why wasn’t he making fun of he, Ron, and Hermione for being behind him? Harry shrugged it off, and saw it as a good sign.

“Wow, I can’t wait until we can actually become animals!” said Ron.

“It wasn’t as hard as I thought,” said Hermione excitedly. “We may be able to becomes Animagi sooner than I thought!”

“Yeah, well, Malfoy will be one before any of us at the rate he’s going anyway. With his ‘skill’ and all...” said Harry grumpily. He was not used to Malfoy being better than him.

Before they new it, they arrived at the Gryffindor common room, and went in. Since no one was around, and they were tired from their Animagus class, they all decided to go to sleep. As Harry got ready for bed, he started thinking of what animal he was going to transform into. He took out his Care of Magical Creatures Book, and looked through it. A bird maybe? A snake? A dragon even? The possibilities were endless.

Harry decided to sleep on it, and flopped down on his bed. When his head hit his pillow, he felt something on his pillow. Harry sat up, and looked to see what it was. It was another piece of parchment. It read:

“I know what you did Harry Potter, I know what you did... unless you want to be in trouble, I suggest to undo your wrong...”

## **Chapter 13- Animals**

Harry couldn't sleep all that night. He was awake, thinking about, and looking at the note. Who sent it? How much did they know? What were they going to do to him? Finally, at around three o' clock in the morning, he decided he would tell Ron and Hermione. After all, they already knew about the Order of the Phoenix, he might as well tell them this too. They might be able to help him.

So finally, at around six in the morning, when breakfast was just being served, Harry got up from bed, got dressed, and went downstairs. He was the only one there for quite a while. Then at around seven, people started coming down. Among them were Ron and Hermione.

"Wha- wha- what are you doing down here so early Harry?" yawned Ron. "It's the weekend... sleep in."

"Oh, I couldn't sleep," said Harry. Ron and Hermione sat down on either side of him and started on their breakfast.

"Why couldn't you sleep?" asked Ron, eating some eggs.

"Because of this," said Harry, slapping the note onto the table. Ron and Hermione lazily looked at the note, not expecting much. However, once they realized what the note said, Ron dropped his fork, and Hermione choked on her waffle.

"What? What do they mean Harry?" asked Hermione after she drank some juice, recovering from her choking incident.

"Well, I have a theory about what it's on..." started Harry. He still hadn't told them that he had stolen Fawkes, and was planning on not telling them. But, now, it appeared he had no choice. He told them about how he and Mrs. Figg had sneaked into Dumbledore's office, he had copied Fawkes, and then taken the original. Then how they snuck out, while Harry saw Tci down the hall.

"Well, why don't you ask Tci about it?" asked Hermione.

"I did, he said he didn't know anything about it!" responded Harry.

"Well, there must have been someone else there that saw you," said Ron.

"Yeah, but, how can I find out who?" asked Harry.

"I know!" said Hermione. "Give it to Professor Flitwick, and then he can perform a Grapholo Charm to see who wrote it and—" her excited speech was cut off by Harry,

“Hermione! I can’t show this to a teacher! They’ll ask who I think I got it from, and why I think I got it, and then they’ll know I stole Fawkes!”

“Well... then I don’t know what you should do Harry. Except... of course! Go to Mrs. Figg!” Harry was in shock and surprise that he hadn’t thought of that. Arabella was the only adult that Harry could talk to about this problem, except for Sirius and Lupin, of course, but they were in Azkaban.

“Excellent idea Hermione! I’ll go to her right now!” Harry shoved the last bit of his muffin into his mouth, and then dashed out of the Great Hall, and to Mrs. Figg’s office. He arrived there soon, and entered. Mrs. Figg was sitting at her desk, grading some papers. The PainBalls from his last class were in a box next to her on the desk.

“What is it Harry?” asked Mrs. Figg. She immediately looked up at him. He reached into his pocket, and took out the note.

“I think someone knows we stole Fawkes, Arabella,” said Harry plainly. Mrs. Figg sat up, and walked over to him, becoming paler with each step. When she arrived at Harry, she looked like Nearly Headless Nick.

“Wha- what do you mean Harry? How could... how?” she stuttered. Harry just offered her the note, and she grabbed it from his hand. She glanced over it quickly and handed it back to Harry, looking positively terrified.

“I got another one just like it a few days ago, after I won the Quidditch match,” said Harry, just adding to the terror on Arabella’s face.

“Do you think you know who- who wrote this Harry?” asked Arabella.

“Well, when we left Dumbledore’s office that night we stole Fawkes, I saw Tci in the hallway.”

“Did you ask him about it yet?” asked Mrs. Figg.

“Yeah, he said he didn’t know anything about it,” said Harry. Mrs. Figg contorted her face into an expression of non-belief. “And... well... I believe him.”

“Well, we’d like to believe him Harry, but as for now, he is our only suspect, and we must treat him as such.”

“Can’t you just do a... oh... what’s it called? A... Grapholo Charm on the note to see who wrote it?” asked Harry. Mrs. Figg gave him a smile, and a weak laugh.

“Harry, the Grapholo Charm is one of the hardest charms there is. The only way I could do it is to learn it from Professor Flitwick, who would want to know my reasons behind

learning it. I'm sorry Harry. That would be a nice solution, but it is an impossible one as well."

"Well, what should we do then?"

"Just stay on the lookout Harry. If you get any more notes like these, show it to me. I don't know if this person is serious about his threats, though. He would obviously want something in return for him not telling, and he hasn't made any demands yet. So yes, Harry, just be on guard... and keep an eye on Tci."

"Alright professor," said Harry, walking out the door.

"Arabella, Harry! Arabella! You're not in class!" yelled Mrs. Figg as Harry ran out, and back to the great hall. He caught Ron and Hermione just before they were about to leave, and he walked back to the common room with them, telling them what Mrs. Figg had said.

"So she reckons Tci did it, eh?" said Ron.

"Yeah, but... I don't know. He just doesn't seem like that type of person," said Hermione.

"Oh Hermione!" said Ron. "You just like him because he's handsome! You know, with his special Durmstrang training thing. Yeah, give me a break! He's in Slytherin after all! This is just the kind of thing one of them would do!"

"Well, he did say he wanted to be in Gryffindor, and he seemed pretty devastated when he found out he was in Slytherin," said Harry, turning the conversation to Tci's favor.

"Yeah, well... we gotta go to Animagus class you guys," said Ron, changing the subject. However, he was right. They were supposed to meet Professor McGonagall early today, so they could spend the entire day practicing. The three of them walked to their Transfiguration classroom, and met Professor McGonagall there, already talking with Malfoy.

"-so I was thinking maybe a dragon, or a hydra of some sort. A powerful, magical beast!" said Malfoy to McGonagall.

"Well, with some practice, you may be able to do all of those Malfoy!" said Professor McGonagall, smiling. It was sickening, a teacher praising Malfoy.... Harry shuddered at the sight. He pushed the door fully open, and the three of them walked in.

"Hello you three! I was just helping Mr. Malfoy here decide which animal to transform into. Have you been thinking about it?" asked Professor McGonagall to them. Each of them nodded. Harry wondered which animals Hormone and Ron were thinking of utilizing.

"Excellent, excellent. I hope each of you have a good idea in mind, because that is what we are going to be doing today, researching animals!" said Professor McGonagall. Hermione smiled excitedly, but Harry and Ron rolled their eyes and sighed. They wanted to get on with transformation, not do research.

"Now, I now you all want to get on with transformation practice," said Professor McGonagall. Wow, could she read minds? Harry thought, "but you need to decide which animal you will be copying before we go any further. So, hit the books!" she pointed to a large stack of books in the corner of the room that reached the ceiling. The three of them walked over, picked out a book (except for Hermione, who took five) and then walked back to a table, and opened them up. Malfoy walked over to the stack of books after Harry, Ron, and Hermione were settled in at a table. He grabbed a particularly large black book, and returned to his secluded table in the corner.

As Harry looked through the book (*A Guide To Almost All Animals*), he saw many creatures he'd never even knew existed before. There were dragons, snakes, and lions, but there were also things called Zyrexes, metallic humanoids with blades for arms that inhabited pyramids. There were also Mylins, small turtle-like beings that had wings, and four eyes. There were uncountable others, as Harry saw while looking through the book for hours on end.

By the time Harry reached the last few pages, he had his heart set on a dragon. It would be big, powerful, and fast. However, when Harry turned to the next page, a different animal caught his eye: a gryffin. It looked exactly like a lion, except for wings that came out of its shoulders. At first, he thought it was a spelling error in the book. He had heard of griffins before, but never gryffins. He looked at the index in the back and, sure enough, they were two separate beasts.

A gryffin would be perfect, thought Harry, turning back to its page. It would still be powerful and fast, only more compact, and more inconspicuous. The more Harry thought about it, the more he knew that he must transform into a gryffin. It was as if voices were calling him to do it.

Harry flipped through the rest of the pages without really looking at the animals, he needed to be a gryffin. He felt as though all other animals were inferior to it, and that he would only be happy when he would be able to become one. Harry looked around, and it appeared as though Ron and Hermione had made their choice. Each of them had a slight smile, and had notes written down on parchment with most of the names crossed off, and only one or two left.

Then, after five straight hours of doing nothing but looking through books, Professor McGonagall spoke.

"It is now two o' clock in the afternoon, and I do not wish to keep you here all day. I hope you have had time to thoroughly research your animal. I want you all to practice making your fingers grow and shrink today and tomorrow. I also want you all to make a

decisive decision on which animal you will be copying, and get a piece of it. Fur, hair, teeth, anything will do. Try to get it by our next class, which will be on Monday, at seven o' clock in the evening. Until then, good-bye and good-luck!" The four of them filed out of the room.

"So, what did you decide on Harry?" asked Hermione.

"A gryffin," said Harry strongly. Ron and Hermione's eyes widened.

"Really? Wow, that's cool Harry," said Ron.

"I thought that's what you might choose," said Hermione. "After all, gryffins are in your blood." Ron and Harry stared at her in question.

"What do you mean Hermione?" asked Harry.

"Don't you know the animal of your own house Harry?" asked Hermione.

"Uh, yeah. A lion," responded Harry, a little annoyed. Hermione sighed.

"Harry, haven't you ever even glanced at Hogwarts, A History?"

"Nope," said Harry and Ron together.

"Well, people think the mascot for Gryffindor is a lion, but that's just because of a mistake. Back when Hogwarts was new, the four founders hired a Muggle artist to paint the banner since wizards were terrible at art."

"When the artist got to the Gryffindor animal on the banner, he thought there was a mistake in the sketch that was given to him. A lion? With wings? Impossible, he thought. So, he painted just a lion instead of a gryffin. By the time he was done, though, Godric Gryffindor had died, and no one knew that he had wanted a gryffin instead of a lion. The original sketches for the banner were discovered just a while ago, and that's when people discovered the truth, though not many cared. They were used to the lion, and it's just stayed that way."

"And what does all that have to do with me?" asked Harry. Hermione gave a deep sigh.

"Harry! Isn't it obvious! You're the heir of Gryffindor, remember?"

"What? How could I be that?" asked Harry, amazed.

"Oh come on," sighed Hermione. "Red and gold sparks shot out of your wand the first time you used it, you pulled Godric Gryffindor's sword out of its sheath. Harry, all signs point to heir of Gryffindor."

“Yeah... I guess you’re right,” said Harry, feeling proud of himself.

“As usual...” murmured Ron, Hermione glared at him.

“But then, why didn’t my dad choose a gryffin for his animal instead of a stag?” asked Harry thoughtfully. Hermione looked puzzled.

“Well... um... I don’t know. Maybe-”

“Ha! For once, Hermione does not know the answer!” said Ron happily as he started skipping and jumping.

“Well, what animal did you choose Hermione?” asked Harry.

“Oh, me? I chose a unicorn,” said Hermione. “Even though it’s a magical creature, and will require a little more work to learn to transform into, I think it’s worth it.”

“But what about gryffins, Hermione? Aren’t they magical?” asked Harry.

“No, sorry Harry, they’re not.”

“But, they can fly and-”

“Harry,” said Hermione stiffly, “if a creature can fly, that doesn’t mean it’s magical. To be magical, a creature must have one special property: it can be used in a potion, and there’s not one single potion in the world that requires anything from a gryffin.”

“Well, I guess it’s a good thing that it’s not magical. It can do a lot, fly and bite, and it won’t require any extra effort to become,” said Harry, looking happy. He called down to Ron who was about twenty feet ahead of them, still skipping along merrily.

“Hey Ron!” yelled Harry. Ron turned around.

“What?” he asked as he started to come back.

“You haven’t told us yet, what animal did you pick?” asked Harry.

“Oh, me? I chose an chameleon,” said Ron.

“An chameleon?” asked Hermione surprised. “Why’d you pick that?”

“Well, it just seemed like it was... calling to me... I suppose...” said Ron.

“Really?” said Harry. “Me too. I saw the gryffin and it was like... telling me to pick it. There was like a voice... in the back of my mind.”

“Me too,” said Hermione looking excited. “I guess this proves that the animal chooses the Animagus, and that the Animagus does not choose the animal.”

“I wonder what animal was calling to Malfoy?” said Harry. Hermione and Ron stared at him.

“Well, we’ll find out soon, when he brings a piece of it in,” said Hermione.

“Oh yeah! That reminds me, where am I going to get a hair or something from a gryffin?” asked Harry. Hermione and Ron nodded.

“We’ll all need help getting a piece of our creature,” said Hermione. “But how?”

“I know!” said Ron. “Hagrid! He’ll probably know where a million gryffins are!” Harry and Hermione nodded in agreement.

“Let’s go see him now,” said Harry. They all headed out of the castle, and to Hagrid’s house on the grounds. As they were heading to the door, they passed the potions classroom and saw Malfoy talking to Professor Fletcher. They were both talking excitedly. Harry shrugged it off, potions was Malfoy’s best class, even though Snape wasn’t around to give him automatic good grades anymore. He was probably trying to do some extra credit or something.

They soon reached Hagrid’s house, and knocked on the door. They heard Hagrid’s dog, Fang, bark loudly, but they didn’t hear Hagrid coming to the door. Harry opened the door slowly to peek inside, no one was there. Just then, Harry felt Hermione tug on his shirt.

“Oh! Harry! Look!” she said. Harry turned around, and saw a unicorn. It was the most beautiful animal Harry had ever seen. It was pure-white, with a silvery mane going from the top of its head all the way down its back, and ending in a perfectly white tail. On top of its head there was a single, clear horn that looked as though it were made of crystal. It merely looked at the three of them, as if asking them to come over.

“Let’s see if we can get a piece of its hair,” said Ron.

“Why?” asked Hermione, looking angry.

“Because you need one to be able to transform into it,” replied Ron.

“Oh, that’s right. I’m sorry Ron,” said Hermione.

“C’mon, let’s go over!” said Harry. They slowly crept towards it, trying to be quiet, but also trying not to look too intimidating. They didn’t want it to run away. After what seemed like a long time, they eventually reached the unicorn. Since they are more friendly to girls than boys, Hermione put one of her hands out, and stroked the unicorn’s

mane. It made a noise, but not a ‘neigh’ like a horse, it was more like a song of a whale. It was long and beautiful.

“That’s a good unicorn,” said Hermione soothingly as she stroked it. “Harry, hand me my wand.” Harry reached into Hermione’s pocket, and pulled out her wand. He handed it to her, and she brought it up to the mane of the unicorn where she had been stroking it.

“Shearus,” said Hermione quietly. A tiny pair of scissors popped out of the tip of her wand. But, just as they came out, the sun’s light reflected off of it, and into the unicorn’s eyes. It made a noise that wasn’t as pleasant as the song before, and it ran into the forest.

“Oh no! I’m sorry unicorn! Come back!” yelled Hermione. “Come on Harry! Let’s follow it!” Hermione ran after the unicorn, and into the dark forest. Harry and Ron started after her.

“Come back unicorn! Come back!” yelled Hermione as they were running, even though it would obviously do her no good. She ran faster and faster after it, and Harry and Ron just tried to follow her, though she was getting ahead of them very quickly.

“Wait... up... Hermione!” yelled Ron, panting. They had been sprinting for several minutes now, and were getting deeper and deeper into the forest. It was getting very dark all around them.

“Let’s... stop... for... a minute,” said Ron, ending his pursuit. Harry stopped with him, though he wasn’t nearly as winded as Ron appeared to be since he had been running and was used to it. Suddenly, they heard Hermione scream, as though from far away.

“Hermione!” yelled Harry and Ron. They both started running again, toward where they heard the voice.

“Oh, what could’ve happened to her?” asked Ron, to nobody. Harry was thinking the same thing. Did the unicorn attack her? Did unicorns attack people?

“Ow!” yelled Ron. Harry looked over, and saw that he’d run into a tree. Harry stopped running, and laughed.

“Ron! C’mon! You’re not that stupid! How could you have run into a tree that was right in front of you?” Ron stepped back, and rubbed his head.

“It wasn’t there a second ago!” he yelled at Harry.

“What do you mean? Of course it was! How could it not be-” Harry suddenly looked at the tree, and realized that it was not a tree at all.

It was a leg.

Harry and Ron screamed at the same time, but Harry looked up instead of staring at the leg. He eyed it all the way up to a massive head which had an expression of curiosity on its face. Harry then realized what it was that Ron had run into: a giant. It was at least thirty feet tall, and was clad in clothing that would have been appropriate for a beggar. It was extremely dirty, and, as Harry thought about it, smelled really bad.

Then Harry looked at the giant's arm, and saw that it was extended out. He eyed it, all the way to the clenched fist... a clenched fist that was holding Hermione!

"Hermione!" yelled Harry as loud as he could. Ron stopped screaming, and looked up at the giant's fist.

"Hermione!" he yelled.

"Help me!" yelled Hermione, though it was very faint, she was at least twenty feet away. Harry ran up to the giant's leg, and pulled out his wand.

"Excalibur!" he yelled, and a long sword popped out of the end of Harry's wand. It was very sharp, and extremely shiny. Harry brought it back, then shoved it with all of his might into the leg of the giant.

"Aaaaaarg!" screamed the giant. It dropped Hermione, making her fall, screaming the entire way down.

"Ron! Get her!" yelled Harry. He was still digging his sword into the giant's leg, causing it to scream even more. When Harry heard a 'thump' sound, he looked over, and saw that Ron had caught Hermione in his arms. She immediately jumped out of them, looking highly embarrassed, and stood up.

"Harry! Let's go!" she yelled. "She'll come after you now!"

"She?" asked Harry and Ron at the same time. They both looked up, and saw that it was indeed a 'she'. It had very long, brown hair, and Harry realized that it was now bending over.

"Let's go!" yelled Harry. He pulled the sword out of the giant's leg, and started running away, not sure of where he was heading. He heard the massive strides of the giant, catching up to them, very quickly. It wasn't long before Harry felt as though he were being squeezed very tightly, which was exactly what was happening.

A humongous hand was curling around Harry, getting a tighter grip on him every second. Harry tried to struggle free, but it was to no avail, it was too tight. He thought of using his wand, but it was in his pocket, which he was unable to reach. Harry glanced over, and saw that Ron and Hermione were in the giant's other hand, both trying to free themselves, as Harry was.

When Harry realized he was about twenty-five feet off the ground, he decided that even if he did free himself, he'd be no better off when he collided with the ground.

"WHA' IS YOU DOIN'!?" yelled the giant, incredibly loud. It was so loud, Harry thought his ears were on fire at first, then he thought that they were going to explode.

"I ASK YOU WHA' YOU IS DOIN'!?" yelled the giant once again. Harry was sure his brain was melting. But suddenly, another voice met his ear,

"Stop! No mom, stop!"

"NO! NOT THIS TIME 'AGRID!'" bellowed the giant. Did she say Hagrid? Harry thought.

"Put them down mom! They're my friends!" said the voice again. As Harry listened to it this time, it did seem familiar, though he couldn't really be sure, the ringing in his ears was excruciating.

"BUT-"

"No buts mom!"

"ALL RIGHT!" Harry felt the sensation of going down very swiftly. It was like he was going down on a roller coaster, only faster. Harry thought he was going to scream, but his feet were on the ground before he could. Harry wobbled backwards for a second, and then brushed himself off. He looked over at Ron and Hermione, they were looking just as dazed as him.

"WHY'D YOU TELL ME T'PUT 'EM DOWN!?" the giant bellowed, only this time it was slightly softer.

"They're students at this school mum, they're my friends!" said the voice again. Harry looked over to see who was speaking, and he was surprised to see that it was indeed Hagrid.

"Hagrid," Harry yelled, "do you know this... this... giant!" Hagrid smiled.

"Well of course I do Harry!" he said. "She's me mum!" Harry's jaw dropped. Looking over, he saw Ron and Hermione with the same expression.

"You mean... that... that..." stuttered Ron.

"Yup, that's Fridwulfa, my mum," said Hagrid as he walked over to the leg of the giant. When he saw the huge gash in her leg, he gasped.

“Mum! Who did this to you?” he asked. Fridwulfa pointed an extremely large at Harry, and glared at him.

“Him! He did it!” Hagrid looked even more shocked at this than he did when he saw the wound.

“But, mum, this is Harry Potter! He’d never do summat like that!”

“OH YES HE WOULD! ASK HIM!” she yelled. Hagrid turned around.

“Harry, did you... did you...”

“Yes,” said Harry, feeling slightly guilty.

“But, why?” asked Hagrid, looking very sad.

“She had Hermione! I didn’t know what she was going to do with her!” yelled Harry, pointing a finger at Fridwulfa.

“Mum! Did you pick ‘er up?” asked Hagrid, indicating Hermione.

“Well... um...” she didn’t sound nearly as menacing as before, or nearly as loud.

“Mom! How many times have I told you! Humans do NOT like bein’ picked up, ‘specially by giants!”

“Well... I...”

“Mum! I want you to apologize to all of-” said Hagrid, but Harry stopped him.

“It’s okay Hagrid!” said Harry. “I’m sorry... uh... Fridwulfa. I was just scared for Hermione.” Instead of glaring at Harry, Fridwulfa gave him a smile.

“It’s okay Harry,” she said, not nearly as loud as before. “It didn’t really hurt, and I guess I shouldn’t have picked up your friend.” She squatted down as low as she could to try and met Harry’s gaze, but she was still a good ten feet above his head, even when all the way down.

“Well, tha’s good. I’m ‘appy it’s all worked out!” said Hagrid, smiling.

“Uh, Hagrid?” asked Ron timidly. “What is she doing here anyway?”

“Well... I’m not really s’posed to talk about it,” said Hagrid defiantly.

“Oh come on Hagrid! They’ve already seen me!” said Fridwulfa.

"Well, I guess yer right mum," said Hagrid. He looked at Harry, then Ron, then Hermione, as if checking to make sure there was nothing wrong with them. "O'er th' summer, I was told to round up all the giants, and try an' get 'em on our side before You-Know-Who did."

"So, are there more?" asked Hermione, looking around. She still seemed a little shaken from her very close encounter with the giant.

"Here? Yeah, there's about two more in th' forest," said Hagrid.

"Three Hagrid," said Fridwulfa. "Olympe jus' brought in another yesterday."

"Olympe?" asked Harry. "You mean... Madame Maxime?"

"Yup," said Hagrid, not sounding the least bit embarrassed. "She was the one who found my mum, and is off gettin' some more now while I teach here."

"But, doesn't she have an entire school to run?" asked Harry.

"Well, yes and no. She's still th' official 'eadmaster, but someone else took over for 'er for a while. Since most of the giants are around her area, we thought she'd be the bes' to do it, been doin' a good job of it I guess!"

"But why are you keeping them in the Forbidden Forest?" asked Harry. "There's got to be better places to hide them!"

"Not really Harry," said Hagrid. "Giants like this kind of place, and since it's near Hogwarts, it's pretty safe."

"Do you think you're going to get all the giants to join us, Hagrid?" asked Hermione. Fridwulfa spoke,

"I doubt it Hermione," she said.

"You mean, they're joining forces with You-Know-Who?" Ron asked quietly, as though terrified to say even 'You-Know-Who'.

"No Ron," said Hagrid. "Most of th' giants prefer ter stay where they are, in their mountain home, or where ever they're livin'. A few of 'em will join us, but most won't, they probably won't even join You-Know-Who." Harry gave a shudder at the thought of what Voldemort's army would be like if he had hundreds of giants on his side.

"So, why are you keeping them here? Why not have an all out attack on You-Know-Who right now?" asked Ron. "Or are you waiting for a special time?" Hagrid frowned.

“Oh! Look at th’ time!” he said, trying to change the subject. “You guys better get back to the castle or you’ll be late fer yer classes! See ya mum!” Hagrid started walking away, dragging Ron and Harry with him.

“See you later Harry!” yelled Fridwulfa as she stood up, and waved good bye.

“So, is this like what all the other teachers were sent out to do last Summer Hagrid? Did they have to recruit giants? Or did they have to do other things? I bet Snape had to—”  
Ron’s babbling was stopped by a shout from Hagrid who let go of them.

“NO!” he yelled, making all three of them feel like they were blown backwards. “You should not even know abou’ this! You cannot talk abou’ this with other students, do yer understand me!?” The three of them nodded in agreement, far to scared to even think about disagreeing.

“Good,” said Hagrid, much more softly. “Dumbledore would skin me alive if he knew yer three saw ‘er!” As they were walking back to the edge of the forest, the whole reason that the three of them had come out finally came to Harry.

“Hagrid,” he asked, “do you know where we can find a gryffin, an chameleon, and a unicorn?” Hagrid immediately tuned around, staring at Harry.

“Uh... depends why, Harry,” he said suspiciously.

“They’re um... for... uh... Professor McGonagall!” he said, trying to come up with a good story.

“Now what would she need those for?” asked Hagrid.

“To... um... uh... grade students on their accuracy! One of her classes had to change some stuff into those animals, and she just wanted something to compare their transfigurations to, something besides pictures in a book,” said Harry. Ron and Hermione looked at him, amazed that he could come up with such a good story.

“Oh!” said Hagrid, looking much happier. “Well, in that case, sure! I can get the chameleon and unicorn easily enough... but the gryffin... that might be a little difficult... I’ll see what I can do. You tell her that, okay Harry?”

“Okay Hagrid,” said Harry. He waved good bye to Hagrid, and then ran back to the castle with Ron and Hermione. When they finally arrived at the front gates, Ron smiled at Harry.

“Excellent story there Harry! I thought you were going to tell him we were becoming Animagi!” he said. “Hey Harry, you think instead of using Aragog to scare everyone away, we could use a giant?”

“I don’t think so Ron, they’re on our side, we don’t want to take advantage of them,” said Hermione.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right. It’s just that… any opportunity to not use a spider, I’d prefer,” he said as Harry and Hermione laughed.

## **Chapter 14- Dueling and Morphing**

The next few weeks of school went very well for Harry. They were not doing anything new in any of his classes, so every free moment he had, he practiced changing himself without a wand. By his next meeting with Professor McGonagall, Harry could make his fingers grow more than a foot and back to normal in less than a second. Ron and Hermione were able to do almost as well, but Hermione was actually having a little trouble. Since she was studying for the O.W.L.s every minute, she didn't have much free time to practice.

When the day finally came to begin their next level of training, all three of them walked up to the Transfiguration classroom feeling quite confident in their ability. When they walked in, though, they were shocked to see smoke filling the entire room. Harry began to panic, what had happened to Professor McGonagall? Was she okay?

“Professor!” he yelled as loud as he could, hoping she would respond to him. Did someone set fire to the room?

“Over here Potter, over here!” came Professor McGonagall’s voice from across the room. She didn’t sound like she was in the least bit of trouble, in fact, she sounded excited. Harry walked towards her voice, coughing and wheezing the whole way. The smoke was so thick, how could professor McGonagall not be in trouble?

When he saw her, however, he realized why she wasn’t in trouble. She was inside a giant bubble that was perfectly clear of smoke, except for a thin line of it that was escaping from a small hole in the bubble. Professor McGonagall had a grin on her face as she was stirring a multicolored potion that was frothing and bubbling all over.

“It should be ready soon Mr. Malfoy!” squealed Professor McGonagall with delight. Harry looked over to the other side of the bubble and saw Draco Malfoy standing there with a very wide grin on his face.

“Why is he making his potion already!?” asked Ron angrily.

“Mr. Malfoy’s potion required a bit more... preparation than a normal Animagus’ potion would,” said Professor McGonagall.

“Why is that?” asked Hermione, sounding hurt. She wasn’t used to others doing more advanced things than her.

“Because,” said Professor McGonagall, “I am pleased to announce that Mr. Malfoy will be Hogwart’s first Polymagus!”

“You mean... that Malfoy!?” asked Ron, in surprise, pointing a finger at Malfoy.

“Yes I do Mr. Weasley,” said Professor McGonagall. “You three can start on your potions now, I have three cauldrons set aside for you. Professor Fletcher will assist you.” She waved her arm lazily behind her, indicating three small black cauldrons.

“But, how do you know he’s a Polymagus and we’re not?” asked Hermione, almost on the verge of tears.

“Actually,” replied Professor McGonagall, “I have just discovered a spell of recent invention that allowed me to discover this. The spell lets one Animagus see the human form of another Animagus. When Mr. Malfoy did a transformation, and I used the spell, and I couldn’t see him, I knew that there were only two possibilities: either he is not an Animagus which cannot be true since he transformed before my eyes, or he is a Polymagus. The spell cannot be used to detect those.” Malfoy gave a sinister smile. He was really enjoying this, thought Harry, being better than them.

“So, you just had to be better than us, didn’t you Malfoy?” asked Ron, practically spitting. Professor McGonagall looked appalled.

“What do you mean Mr. Weasley!” yelled Professor McGonagall. “Being a Polymagus is a very rare gift! In fact, I can only think of three wizards in the history of magic, not including Mr. Malfoy here, who were Polymagi. This is certainly not something that he chose to have.”

“Yeah Weasley,” said Malfoy, almost sarcastically. “Of course I didn’t choose this!” What did he mean? thought Harry. How could he have chosen to be a Polymagus?

“I believe the rest of you have potions to be making,” came a familiar voice. Harry looked over, and saw Professor Fletcher standing there, looking impatient.

“Oh, sorry professor!” said Harry, Ron, and Hermione together as they walked away from Professor McGonagall and over to their cauldrons, trying to ignore Malfoy’s snickers.

“Alright,” said Professor Fletcher. “Hagrid brought up your three animals this morning. I need each of you to get a piece of it, and then give it to me. Harry and Hermione, get a hair from your animal. Ron, yours will be a bit more difficult. You’ll have to get the chameleon’s tail.”

“His tail?” asked Ron, confused.

“Yes, but it will grow back. Don’t worry,” said Professor Fletcher. “Your animals are over there.” He pointed to three cages that were outside the bubble. Each one of them had an animal inside it.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione stepped through the bubble, and towards the cages, the smoke significantly cleared since Malfoy's potion had just stopped bubbling. They each arrived at the cage of their respective animal.

Harry's cage was about three feet tall, and five feet long. He peered inside and saw a wonderful creature. It looked like a lion, but it was not a brownish-orange, it was a light gold with a huge bushy mane. Harry saw the wings on the gryffin, they were a bright white, and when light from the window shined on them, Harry had to turn away from the shine. The gryffin gave a lazy yawn, and the teeth were magnificent. They appeared to be made out of crystal, and there were hundreds of them, all perfectly clear and sparkling. When he finished with his yawn, the gryffin glanced over at Harry, and their eyes met.

Harry felt hypnotized. Whatever he did, he felt as though he could not leave the gryffin's view. He fell deeper and deeper into them, and he felt as though he was the gryffin. He could feel fur all over his body, he felt extremely warm all over. Harry closed his eyes, and he felt himself flying. It wasn't anything like being on a broom, he was flying under his own power...

"Harry!" yelled Hermione. Harry opened his eyes and suddenly remembered where he was. He looked over, and saw that Hermione was holding a long, silvery hair. The unicorn inside her cage was asleep. On top of that cage was a smaller one with a small green blur running all around it. Harry looked over next to that cage, and saw Ron holding a small green thing in his hand, far away from him, as if it were something revolting. Then, Harry remembered, it was something bad. It was the chameleon's tail.

"Harry? Did you get your hair yet?" asked Hermione. Harry gave her a glazed look. "Are you okay Harry? You look like you're asleep."

"No, I'm okay," said Harry. He reached his hand inside the cage containing the gryffin. It was still staring at Harry, not moving or blinking. What's wrong with it? wondered Harry. He nervously moved his hand toward the mane of the gryffin, and quickly pulled out a hair from it. The gryffin didn't move.

Harry stood up, and backed away slowly, returning to his cauldron which was now filled with a thick, black liquid that Professor Fletcher had obviously put in there. The same was in Ron and Hermione's cauldrons.

"Okay, now put your animal piece into the potion, and wait until it changes color," said Professor Fletcher to them. Harry dipped his hair into the cauldron, and bubbles suddenly started appeared near where it hit the concoction. After a few seconds, the potion turned a dark yellow. Harry looked over and saw that Hermione's was a light-red, almost pink, and Ron's was a deep green. Professor Fletcher was handing each of them a small box.

"Drop this box in now. It contains all the rest of the ingredients for the potion," said Professor Fletcher to them. Harry dropped the box in, and the potion immediately started fuming. Thick white smoke poured out of the top, and into the air.

"Oh, this is exciting! Isn't it?" said Professor Fletcher. Ron shrugged,

"Yeah, I guess it is. I mean, I can't wait to actually--"

"No that!" said Professor Fletcher loudly. "I mean, Mr. Malfoy here being our first Polymagus!" Harry, Ron, and Hermione sighed.

"He has the potential and talent necessary for transfiguration unlike any other student I've ever seen."

Harry was about to respond, saying something bad about Malfoy, but just then he was taken surprise when his potion stopped smoking and bubbling and became white. Professor Fletcher looked over at them, taking notice of this.

"Your potions are ready. You need to drink them quickly," he said. He gave each of them a small glass. Harry dunked his glass into the potion. It was surprisingly warm, and as he put his glass further down, got almost unbearably hot, too the point of burning. Harry quickly brought the glass up to his lips, and drank it. It tasted very good, like liquid happiness. However, a very unexpected thing happened. This potion didn't feel like it was going down his throat and to his stomach. It felt as though it was going... up. It was flowing up his sinuses, and into his brain. It was seething its way through every pore in Harry's mind.

This did not feel nearly as good as drinking it. In fact, it was very painful. Harry dropped the glass, and it shattered into a million pieces. Harry's head felt as though it was ripping apart. He glanced over and saw that Ron and Hermione were obviously experiencing the same feelings since they were squirming on the floor and had their hands gripping their screaming faces.

Harry decided he had to do something to try and stop the pain. He focused his mind on a joyous thought, and tried only to think of that, like he did in Mrs. Figg's class. This was just a bigger PainBall, thought Harry, trying to reassure himself. Harry searched his mind for the happiest thought he could muster... the time he was with Cho.

Suddenly, the pain went away. Harry took his hands off of his face, and put them back down to his sides. Harry walked over to Ron and Hermione, each of whom was still squirming on the floor. Harry helped them up, off the ground. They stopped screaming, but were still clutching their heads.

"Don't worry. The pain will go away in a few seconds," said Professor McGonagall. She walked over from Malfoy's cauldron over to them. After she said it, Ron and Hermione stopped gripping their heads.

"How come your pain went away so fast Harry?" asked Ron.

“I just used that little technique we learned in Defense Against the Dark Arts,” responded Harry.

“I should’ve remembered to use that!” said Hermione. “What caused the pain anyway professor?”

“It was caused by the animal’s DNA merging with yours. You have to contain twice as much as before, in the same amount of space. Your body had to change around slightly to make room,” said Professor McGonagall. “Now that you have had the potion, we can go into your next phase of training: actually turning into the animal.”

“See you later professor!” said Malfoy. He walked out of the room, carrying a glass full of his multicolored potion.

“Why is he leaving?” asked Ron. “Doesn’t he have to train with us?”

“Well, no Mr. Weasley,” said Professor McGonagall. “Mr. Malfoy will continue his training privately. He will need… err… special attention.”

“Why is he leaving now, though?” asked Hermione.

“Mr. Malfoy’s potion will hurt him considerably more than yours did. He is taking in the DNA of several animals, and may have to stay the night with Mrs. Pomfrey. He is heading to the hospital wing now.” A sudden feeling of sadness came over Harry. Even though he and Malfoy were enemies, he still didn’t want him to have to go through pain like that. He didn’t want anyone to have to. Just the one animal potion was bad enough, a many animal potion would be worse than the Cruciatus Curse.

“Now back to your training. By the end of this session, you should all be able to form the head of your animal. To start, close your eyes.”

Harry closed his eyes, and darkness was all around him.

“Picture your animal’s face. Imagine every curve, every hair, every detail, no matter how small,” said professor McGonagall soothingly. Harry visualized the gryffin’s face. He remembered the gryffin’s golden hair, its crystal teeth, and its deep eyes. He tried to picture the head on his own body, and had to keep from laughing.

“Open your eyes,” came Professor McGonagall’s voice. Harry opened his eyes and there was a mirror floating in front of his face. Harry jumped back when he saw what he saw in it.

Harry saw his face in it, only it was more… hairy. His entire head was covered in golden hair, and he had a small mane growing all around his neck. Harry opened his mouth and saw small, clear, sharp teeth popping out.

Harry looked over at Ron and burst out laughing (well, growling). Ron's face was a light green, and he had big, bulging eyes that were at least the size of baseballs. Hermione had a shiny horn coming out of her head that was about five inches long, and her face was becoming slightly elongated. But, just as Harry saw them all this way, all three of them went back to normal. They all looked extremely disappointed.

"Why'd we go back to normal so quickly professor?" asked Hermione, feeling her head for any sign of a horn.

"You were not concentrating on your animal form," said Professor McGonagall sternly. "You three were looking at each other's transformations, and you stopped thinking about your own."

"How come we didn't transform exactly into our animals professor?" asked Ron. "I imagined every detail on the chameleon, and all I got were the eyes."

"And the green skin," whispered Harry to Ron. They both laughed silently.

"In order to do a perfect transformation, Mr. Weasley, you need to exaggerate your animal's features in your mind. If its horn is eight inches tall, imagine it to be sixteen. If its skin is a light-green, imagine it to be a dark lime. The more you exaggerate your features, the more accurate you will be."

"And Sirius made this look easy," whispered Ron to Harry. Professor McGonagall had heard him.

"Yes, he does make it look easy Mr. Weasley. As does any Animagus. However, it took him all of three years to get it down perfectly, and each of you has barely worked on it for a week. Now, continue imagining your animals and their features. When you do transform, concentrate hard on staying that way, try not to become distracted."

Harry, Ron, and Hermione worked on their transformations until late into the evening. They got tips from Professor McGonagall and by the time she announced the lesson was over, each of them could perfectly form the head of their animals, and hold it for about ten seconds. It was very difficult to keep from laughing and becoming distracted while transforming, especially when Ron's head shrunk down to the size of the chameleon's, being far too small for his body.

As they were walking down the hallways, finally leaving their lesson, talking excitedly about their transformations, they stopped suddenly after hearing a very loud scream from far away.

"What was that?" whimpered Hermione.

"I don't know," said Harry, standing dead in his tracks looking around. The voice screamed again.

“It’s coming from over there!” yelled Ron. He pointed his wand in the direction of the Great Hall, and when they entered the room, the voice screamed again. All of their heads tuned the other door that led out of the Great Hall, and near the Headmaster’s office. They ran though that door, and when they got through it, the scream came again.

“It’s coming from the Hospital Wing,” said Harry. At once, he immediately realized what was going on. “It’s Malfoy. He must have drink his potion.” Each of them put an expression of forced sadness on their faces, and the scream came again.

“Should we see him?” asked Hermione.

“No, that’s probably the last thing he wants: to be comforted by his enemies, us thinking he’s weak,” said Harry. “Let’s give him this one.” They all walked away from the Hospital Wing, and back to the Gryffindor Common Room. While they were walking, they head no more screaming, so either Malfoy wasn’t in pain anymore, or Madam Pomfrey had just put a Sound Proofing Charm on the room.

Harry and Ron said goodnight to Hermione, and they each went up the staircases into their dorms. When Harry and Ron, got in their room, Seamus, Dean, and Neville were already asleep. Ron strode over to his bed, and pulled out a calendar from under his pillow.

“What’s that?” asked Harry as his put on his night shirt.

“Oh, this?” said Ron. “It’s a calendar. I’m marking off the days until Halloween.”

“Why are you doing that?” asked Harry. Ron looked at him in surprise.

“Don’t you remember? That’s when we’re going to rescue Lupin and Sirius from Azkaban!” said Ron as he took out a red quill and marked off another day.

“Oh yeah,” said Harry. He had forgotten about that with the excitement of becoming an Animagus. They still had work to do to prepare. “How long until we go?”

“Two weeks,” said Ron, with a hint of fear in his voice. He was evidently no more anxious to do this than Harry was.

All through breakfast the next morning, Malfoy kept glancing at Harry, Ron, and Hermione, and laughing. Soon being followed by almost the entire Slytherin table.

“I wish there was some way we could show Malfoy how bad he really is, and how good we are. Like, dueling with him or something,” said Ron as he lazily did a Originus Charm on a copied ball in Charms class. Harry got an idea:

“That’s it Ron!” said Harry excitedly. “We can start the Dueling Club again!” Ron and Hermione laughed. There was a Dueling Club in their second year, but it was very unsuccessful. All they had gotten from it was the Disarming Spell.

“You can’t be serious Harry,” said Ron. “I mean, we’ve got Quidditch and rescuing Sirius and Lupin to worry about.”

“Oh come on Ron,” said Harry. “Our next Quidditch match isn’t until after Halloween, and we can set the meeting of the club for after we rescue Sirius and Lupin.”

“If we rescue them,” said Hermione, pessimistically. Harry and Ron looked at her.

“That doesn’t sound like you Hermione,” said Ron.

“It’s just that, well, I’ve been reading about Azkaban-”

“Big surprise there,” said Ron quietly so that only Harry could hear.

“-and it’ll be next to impossible to get inside, much less rescue Sirius and Lupin.”

“Don’t worry Hermione. I... I’ve got it all worked out,” lied Harry. He didn’t know what made him say that, he just wanted to make sure she wouldn’t back out of their plan.

“Well, I guess so, but, I expect to know exactly what it is before we go!” said Hermione, looking slightly happier.

“Anyway,” said Ron. “Back to the Dueling Club.”

“I thought you said it was a bad idea,” said Harry.

“Well, with You-Know-Who around again, it’d be nice to have some dueling experience on our side,” said Ron. “And it would be nice to kick Malfoy’s butt.”

“What do you say Hermione? You in?” asked Harry.

“Sure, I mean, it’d be great practice for the O.W.L.s,” said Hermione, not looking at either of them, but concentrating on her Originus Charm. “So yeah, of course I’m in.”

“Now the only problem is: which teacher are we going to get to supervise us?” asked Ron.

“Maybe Professor Fletcher or Mrs.- er... Professor Figg,” said Harry.

“I’ve got a better idea!” said Hermione. “How about Professor Flitwick? I mean, he was the dueling champion when he was in school so I’m sure he could give us some excellent tips!”

“Good idea,” said Harry and Ron together. Just then, the bell rang, signaling the end of class. Instead of leaving, Harry, Ron, and Hermione went up to professor Flitwick.

“Excuse me Professor,” said Harry. Professor Flitwick spun around with a smile so wide, it looked like it would barely fit on his small head.

“Yes Harry? What is it?”

“Well, we were thinking about starting up another Dueling Club, and we were wondering if you’d want to help us,” said Harry hopefully. Professor Flitwick’s smile got, if it is possible, even larger.

“Oh, you three... I’d be honored!” squeaked Professor Flitwick.

“Really?” said Harry in surprise. He didn’t think Professor Flitwick would be that eager to do it. “You really want to help?”

“Of course I do Harry!” said Professor Flitwick. “I think dueling is an excellent thing to know, and I was the school champion in my day, you know. We should have our first meeting on Halloween, when-”

“No, that’s not a good day professor,” interrupted Hermione. He looked at her funny. “That’s... um... when we have to stay after with professor McGonagall to do some extra credit.”

“Oh, ok. Well, how about a week after Halloween?” asked Professor Flitwick.

“That’s good,” said Harry, wanting to sound agreeable to Professor Flitwick since he didn’t ask any questions about their “extra credit” in Transfiguration.

“We’ll need a captain you know,” said Professor Flitwick, looking at Harry. “How about it Harry? You up to it?”

“Yeah Harry, it was your idea after all,” said Hermione. Ron, however, was silent.

“No,” said Harry defiantly. “I think we should have a competition and the winner should become captain. I don’t want people to think I’m captain just because I’m famous.” Ron gave Harry a smile of appreciation. Though he never said it out loud, Ron had always been jealous of Harry, and Harry wanted to give him the opportunity to show himself.

“Excellent idea,” said Professor Flitwick as his next class was filing in. “Well I have to go teach my next class now, and I suspect you have to go to your next lesson.” Harry, Ron, and Hermione each nodded.

“Yes, and, thanks professor,” said Harry as they left the classroom, avoiding the small first years walking in.

“Hey Harry!” yelled Joe, the little Gryffindor first year. “Joo rozorz meh soxorz!”

“Uh... good,” said Harry, running away from him as fast as possible.

## **Chapter 15- The Plan**

Harry still had no idea how he, Ron, and Hermione made it through the next week. Every day they would wake up, go to their classes, do their homework, go to Animagus lessons (Malfoy was never present at one), go to Quidditch practice (Hermione would watch and read her books), talk to Professor Flitwick about how the Dueling Club should be organized, and then end the day discussing how they would rescue Sirius and Lupin, and collapse in their beds at around two in the morning.

All of this was paying off though: each of them could successfully transform the heads of their animals, and keep it for as long as they wanted. Ron was able to get down to the size of a chameleon fairly well, and Harry could even transform his back into wings, and he was getting pretty good at flying with them. None of them had seen what animal Malfoy had chosen.

The Dueling Club was decided to be almost like official duels: two teams of two wizards each who fight until either one gives up, or is disarmed. If, after the qualifiers for the captain, people wanted to do un-official duels (one on one, two on one, or even three on one), those would take place.

“Maybe we should cause a distraction,” suggested Ron at their latest meeting on how to rescue Sirius and Lupin. Halloween would be tomorrow, and they still didn’t have a good idea on how to get in to Azkaban, much less get into some cells and rescue two people. “I mean, if we can confuse the dementors, then maybe we can slip by them.”

“But what kind of distraction Ron?” asked Hermione, right before she yawned. It was already midnight, and the Gryffindor Common room was completely empty. It was almost pitch black except for a few candles around the three of them.

“Harry can do his p- p- p- Patronus Charm,” yawned Ron. A Patronus Charm was a spell that conjured a patronus, a kind of silvery protector, a shield between you and a dementor. It prevented the happiness from being sucked out of you.

“No, I don’t think so Ron,” said Harry. “I mean, there’s bound to be hundreds of dementors there, and I don’t think a single patronus can fend them all away. And even if it does, there’s going to probably be other wizard guards there who won’t be affected by it.”

“Why don’t we just buy some dementor costumes, run into Azkaban wearing them, and bang our heads on the cells until they open,” suggested Harry sarcastically. Ron and Hermione glared at him.

“Harry, we need a better plan than that!” said Hermione.

“Oh come on!” said Harry. “We’re all tired, and we have a big task tomorrow! I’m sure we’ll think of something when we get there.”

“I don’t think we should leave it to chance Harry,” said Ron.

“Well I do, Ron,” said Harry. “I have a feeling that we’ll get an idea when we arrive. Maybe we’ll see a secret passage or something.”

“Maybe you’re right Harry,” said Ron. “Besides, we’ve got a bigger problem, how are we going to get to Azkaban in the first place? I mean, we’re not going to just walk there, are we?” Harry stroked his chin,

“Well, I’m getting pretty good at flying with my wings, so I can do that. I guess you two can share my Firebolt,” suggested Harry.

“We both won’t fit,” said Ron. “A Firebolt’s only big enough for one.”

“Well,” said Harry, “Ron, you can become smaller, and then you and Hermione will fit on the broom.”

“Oh god, I hope no one sees us,” said Hermione. “A kid with wings flying next to a girl on a broom holding a ten inch boy.” Harry and Ron burst out laughing and when they couldn’t stop, they decided it was time for bed.

“Well meet here at five o’ clock, just when the feast starts,” said Harry as they all wobbled to their dorms.

Harry slept in later that day then he did all of his life, to catch up on the sleep he missed the last week, and to save his strength. He’d need it when he had to fly all the way to Azkaban.

When he finally got up at two in the afternoon, he sprinted down to the common room, and was surprised to see almost no one there except for Ron and Hermione (who were engaged in a game of chess) and a few younger kids.

“Where have you been sleepyhead?” asked Hermione as Ron took her queen. Harry shook himself awake, and looked around.

“Where is everyone?” he asked groggily.

“Hogsmeade,” said Ron as he put Hermione in checkmate. “It’s the first trip of the year. We decided not to go, Hogsmeade’s started to lose its... excitement.” Harry smiled, Hogsmeade was plenty exciting, especially when he was at the theater with Cho. All of a sudden, Ron gave a very loud laugh.

“What is it Ron?” asked Hermione. “I didn’t play that bad... did I?”

“No, no... it’s not that Hermione,” said Ron, still laughing. “It’s just that... I can’t believe we didn’t think about this before... how is it that we’re going to be here and at Azkaban at the same time?” Harry and Hermione stared at him.

“What do you mean Ron?” asked Harry.

“Well, people are bound to notice that we’re gone for a few days, aren’t they?” asked Ron. “I mean, while we’re at Azkaban, how will people not notice that we’re not here?” Harry and Hermione’s mouths dropped wide open.

“How... did... we... not... think... of... that...?” asked Hermione, sounding appalled at the fact that she did not think of something.

“How are we going to accomplish that?” asked Harry. He looked at Hermione, expecting an answer.

“Well, we could make models of ourselves and then try to bring them to life, but... oh no... there’s no way we can do anything! We only have three hours! Why didn’t we think of this earlier!?” Hermione looked as though she might collapse from worrying.

“Hermione!” yelled Harry. “Calm down! We will think of something!”

“What? In three hours? You’re going to think of something?” she asked.

“Well, yeah...” started Harry, but then he looked around. “Actually... no.” Hermione looked like she was going to explode,

“No?! Well, we have to think of-”

“No, I mean I won’t think of something, Aylar will!” said Harry. He looked over at Aylar, who was busy making a perfect sculpture of a dragon out of a large block of marble to the entertainment of some other first years, looked over at Harry, apparently hearing him say his name.

“What will I think of, Harry?” he asked. Harry had to think of something fast, he wasn’t ready just yet.

“Well, Aylar... you see... um... well...” Harry had to think of something fast or Aylar would get suspicious. Suddenly, an idea popped into his head, “I like Ginny.” Aylar raised an eyebrow.

“And what does that have to do with anything?” he asked.

“Well... I’m currently going out with Cho,” continued Harry, having a slight idea about where he was heading. “You see, I promised Cho that I’d go out with her tonight after the Halloween feast, but then Ginny came up to me, and asked if I would go out with her the

same time. I didn't want to say no to her since I like her, but I also don't want to cancel my date with Cho. So, I need to be in two places at once. Any ideas?" Ron and Hermione were looking at Harry with an expression of amazement on their faces. Aylar, however, smiled.

"Of course Harry," he said. "Just use a Cloning Charm on yourself." Harry could have kicked himself in the face.

"Oh! Thanks Aylar!" said Harry affectionately. Aylar started to walk away.

"Don't mention it.... Oh, and by the way Harry... don't expect any luck with Ginny... she's already busy," said Aylar as he walked back to his group, shaking his head. Harry turned around to an excited Hermione, and a confused Ron.

"Excellent story Harry!" said Hermione. "I couldn't have come up with anything better!"

"What did he mean by Ginny being 'busy'?" asked Ron, being big-brotherly. "What does he know that we don't?"

"Uh, about a million spells," said Harry. Then, seeing the look on Ron's face, "Oh don't worry Ron, he was probably just joking." Ron's frown turned into a smile again.

"Yeah, I guess you're right Harry," said Ron.

"Geez, what's wrong with me today?" Hermione asked herself. "I never thought about us having to be in two places at once, and I didn't think of using the Cloning Charm. Maybe I should see Madam Pomfrey." Ron and Harry laughed.

"We had better get started making the clones of ourselves," said Harry. "In case a problem comes up, we want to have time figure it out." Ron and Hermione nodded in agreement.

"Where should we make the clones?" asked Ron.

"Well, definitely not here," said Harry. "Or in any of the classrooms. Who knows who might pop in and see two of each of us. Where would we be guaranteed that no one would ever see us?" A smirk came across Hermione's face.

"The girls' bathroom!" she said. In their second year at Hogwarts, they had to make a Polyjuice potion, and to hide it from everyone, they made it in the broken down girls' bathroom.

"Great idea Hermione!" said Ron. "The only person who'd see us would be Moaning Myrtle, and it's not like she'd care." Moaning Myrtle was the miserable ghost of a girl who haunted the bathroom.

"Right, let's go," said Harry. They walked out of the common room, and to the girls' bathroom. Even though no one would see them, or know they'd been in there, it still felt weird to Harry to go inside. When they got in, it was exactly how Harry had remembered it: rusty and disgusting.

"Who's there?" came a voice from one of the stalls. The door to it opened, and before them was Moaning Myrtle. She floated about three feet off the ground, right above a puddle of water which Harry hoped was made from Myrtle's tears.

Instead of crying and moping around, though, a smile came across Myrtle's face as she saw the three of them. She flew towards them, and put her arms around them. Harry, Ron, and Hermione were all very surprised.

"Oh, it's so good to see you again... especially you Harry," said Myrtle, blushing slightly. Harry made a very forced smile, and Ron nudged him.

"I think Myrtle likes you Harry," he said, trying hard not to laugh. Myrtle, however, appeared to have heard them.

"Hey, I'm old, not dead!" she said, jokingly..

"What?" said Hermione. "Myrtle, you're young, and you are dead!" All three of them laughed, and, surprisingly, Myrtle took part in the laughter. Harry, Ron, and Hermione stopped immediately. This was the first time any of them had heard Myrtle laugh. It was very eerie.

"Uh, Myrtle?" asked Ron. "Why are you laughing?" Myrtle stopped, and glared at Ron.

"Because what she said was funny, Ron," spat Myrtle. "Am I not allowed to laugh at funny things?" Ron went red.

"Uh, no. Of course not Myrtle... it's just that... well, you've never laughed before," stuttered Ron.

"Well, I've taken a new outlook on life- err... death, Ron. It's been more than fifty years since I've died, and I still haven't crossed over into the next life yet." Ron and Harry looked confused. "You know," said Myrtle, seeing their faces. "When I stop being a ghost and become a spirit."

"Yeah, sure Myrtle..." said Harry, not really knowing what she was talking about.

"So what are you doing here?" asked Myrtle.

"We have to make copies of ourselves," blurted Hermione. She immediately put her hands over her mouth as though to try and erase what she said, but it was too late.

“Why do you need to do that?” asked Myrtle suspiciously. Harry decided he might as well use the same story as before.

“Because all of us want to go to Hogsmeade with two different people,” said Harry. Myrtle eyed him suspiciously.

“Really?” she asked slowly. “All three of you?”

“Yes,” Harry, Ron, and Hermione said in unison.

“Okay.... Well then, I’ll leave you to do that,” she said as she disappeared out a window in the room. The three of them breathed a sigh of relief.

“Well there’s something you don’t see everyday,” said Harry.

“Let’s do this,” said Ron, taking his wand out of his pocket. Harry and Hermione followed him and took their wands out as well.

“Let’s make a circle, and each make a copy of the other,” said Hermione. Harry nodded in agreement, it would be rather difficult to do it on yourself. Harry got behind Ron, and he got behind Hermione. They formed a rather triangular circle. Hermione pointed her wand to Harry’s back, and Ron pointed his wand to Hermione’s back. Harry pointed his wand to Ron’s back.

“Clonusout!” they all yelled at the same time. Harry immediately saw a fuzzy version of Ron forming next to him. He suddenly felt as though he had run a mile. Copying humans was evidently harder than copying pillows. The copied Ron was slowly coming into focus, like a bad television station you were adjusting. Every second was like sprinting another hundred yards. Harry was panting now, feeling his muscles ache all over.

Finally, after what felt like a marathon run, the copy of Ron was crystal clear, and Harry collapsed on the floor, gasping for breath. Each was difficult to draw, but he was slowly gaining his strength back. Harry wondered how Ron and Hermione did. He immediately leapt to his feet, and looked at them. They were standing upright, but there were no clones of Harry or Hermione to be seen.

“Where are your clones?” asked Harry. Ron and Hermione bent their heads down.

“We couldn’t do it Harry,” said Hermione. “It just took too much energy.” Harry put his hand on his forehead, disappointed.

“You’re just stronger than us Harry,” said Ron. “I guess you do more exercise in those Quidditch practices than I do.” Harry gave a deep sigh.

“Well, what are we going to do?” asked Harry. “We only have one clone.”

"Well... could you... do us?" asked Hermione, twisting her foot on the ground. Harry sighed again.

"I guess I could, but I'd rather not if I didn't have to," said Harry. But suddenly, an idea came to him. "I've got it!" Harry pointed his wand at Ron's arm.

"Engorgio!" yelled Harry. Ron's arm got bigger and bigger, the muscles were bulging, they looked as though they were in danger of popping out of Ron's skin. When Ron's biceps were about six inches high, Harry stopped, and did the spell on the other one.

"There you go Ron! You should have plenty of strength, enough to make a hundred clones," said Harry. Ron raised his arms above his head, and then brought them down upon a sink behind him. There was an earsplitting loud crash, and then all that remained of the sink was a small pile of dust.

"I could get used to this!" said Ron.

"Well, you shouldn't," said Hermione. "The Engorgio Charm only works on humans for a little while. You're massive arms will be back to how they were before in less than a half hour." Ron frowned.

"Oh, and I was just getting to like them!" said Ron.

"Yeah, yeah, back to work now," said Harry. "Ron, use the Cloning Charm on me and Hermione, and then lets get ready to go, we only have about two hours left. Ron quickly took his wand out, and pointed it at Harry.

"Clonusout!" he yelled, and Harry suddenly felt lighter. He felt as though he were a few inches off the ground. Then, he felt like he was spinning, slowly at first... but then faster... and faster. Harry felt as though he was going to be sick, he wished Ron would hurry up with the spell.

Then, suddenly, the sensation stopped, and Harry saw a copy of himself standing right next to him. The clone's eyes were closed, it looked like it was asleep.

After he was done admiring his clone, Harry looked over at Hermione who was eyeing her copy, which also appeared to be asleep. It was very odd, seeing two identical people standing right next to each other. But, Harry thought about Fred and George, and the idea didn't sound as odd as before.

"Alright," said Harry to Ron. "Good job!" Ron walked over to his clone, who was asleep as well.

"How do we wake them up?" asked Ron, looking at his copy as though it were a statue, peering around the head and the back.

“I dunno,” said Harry. “Snap your fingers?” Ron laughed, and loudly snapped his fingers directly in front of his clone. Unexpectedly, Ron’s clone’s eyes opened quickly.

“Ah!” yelled the clone, walking backwards. “What’s going on here!?” He walked backwards more, until he suddenly tripped over his feet, and fell into a trashcan. Ron walked over to him, and helped him out.

“Why, why are you... me?” asked the clone of Ron. Ron laughed.

“Well, we’re not perfect clones, are we?” asked Ron, indicating his bulging arms. His clone gave a very weak smile. Harry, seeing that this was not going anywhere, decided to speak up.

“You see,” said Harry to Ron’s clone, “you are a clone of Ron.” It was the best Harry could think of to say. How else do you break it to someone that you’re a clone of someone else? Ron’s clone had an expression of utmost surprise on his face.

“You mean... I’m just a clone of him?” asked Ron’s clone, pointing to Ron.

“Yes,” said Ron. “We need you to pretend to be me for a few days.”

“I am you,” said the clone. Ron sighed.

‘No, you don’t understand,’ said Ron. ‘Harry copied me, and you are the copy.’ The clone smiled and shook his head.

“No way,” he said. “I can’t be a clone. I am Ron. I have memories, I am not a copy.” Harry now knew they were definitely not going to convince Ron’s clone that he was a copy. They had to form a different plan.

“You know what,” said Harry to Ron’s clone. “You’re right. You’re not a clone, we are the clones.” Ron’s clone folded his arms, and nodded his head.

“I knew it,” he said. Ron and Hermione looked at Harry, apparently confused. Harry mouthed, “Play along.”

“If you’re the clones,” asked Ron’s clone, “then why did you pretend I was?” Harry gritted his teeth, he hadn’t should’ve expected this.

“Um... you see... we were...um... testing you. To... uh... make sure you were the originals. The people we were cloned from. Only the true originals would have all the memories.” The clone of Ron seemed to have accepted this.

“I see... but, why don’t I remember cloning you guys and, why does my clone have bigger arms than me?” he asked them.

“Well, um... to answer your first question... um... the Cloning Charm took so much energy out of you that you... uh... collapsed,” said Harry, hoping that Ron’s copy would believe him. “And your clone’s arms are bigger than yours because... uh... you accidentally used an Engorgio Charm on them when you were almost unconscious from using the Cloning Charm.” Though he looked a little confused, Ron’s clone seemed satisfied with this.

“One last question,” he said. “Why did we clone you?”

“Because we’re going to Azkaban to rescue Sirius and Lupin,” said Harry. Ron’s clone smiled and nodded.

“Yeah, why risk our necks when we can make clones of ourselves and let them do it?” he said, laughing afterwards.

“Speaking of which,” said Hermione, playing along, “we’ve got to go now. We want to have time to scare Aragog into the Great Hall. Don’t forget to play along with the crowd and be scared.” Ron’s clone nodded, and Ron, Harry and Hermione started to walk out of the bathroom.

“Oh, don’t forget to wake them up!” yelled Harry to Ron’s clone just before he left the bathroom. As soon as they were outside the shut door, all three of them leaned against the wall, and slid down, giving a deep sigh.

“Great job Harry,” said Ron, rubbing his face with his now back-to-normal-size arms. “Great story. I can’t believe you came up with another good one!” Harry grinned and looked at his watch.

“Oh no!” he said, realizing the time. “we only have a half an hour until the Halloween Feast starts! We really have got to get going!” The three of them stood up, and ran to the Gryffindor common room, which was now filled with students returning from Hogsmeade. Harry and Ron tried to avoid as many people as they could as they ran to their dorm to get the map to Azkaban and Harry’s Firebolt. As soon as they found it, they bolted back to the common room, met up with Hermione, and ran out to Hagrid’s hut by the Forbidden Forest.

“Are you ready for this?” asked Harry. Ron and Hermione gave him nervous smiles and nods before they entered the forest.

“All we have to do is find a spider, and then follow it,” said Harry, remembering how he and Ron found Aragog before. They walked deeper and deeper into the forest, with only small beams from their wands to guide them in their search. After several minutes of searching, Harry saw something move.

“I see something!” he yelled quietly to Ron and Hermione. They crept up to him, and shone their beams in the direction he was pointing. Their beams landed on a small, dark green bush that was shaking.

“Ah!” said a voice. Harry turned around to see if it was Ron or Hermione, but they were still fixated on the bush.

“Did you hear that?” Harry asked them. They shook their heads.

“Ah! Bright!” said the voice again.

“Did you hear that?” Harry asked them again. Rona and Hermione shook their heads again. How could they not hear it? Then, it came to Harry.

“Show yourself,” said Harry. Only, it didn’t come out in those words, it came out in a long hiss, exactly like a snake. Ron and Hermione looked at Harry, afraid, but he knew what he was doing. Harry was a Parselmouth, he could talk to snakes.

That night, when Voldemort attacked Harry and his parents, and Voldemort used the Killing Curse on Harry, Voldemort did not only lose his powers, he transferred some of them into Harry. The scar on Harry’s forehead was where some of Voldemort’s powers flowed into him. One of the powers that Harry had received was Voldemort’s ability to converse with snakes, something that very few wizards could do.

The snake popped his head off the bush, and stared at Harry with unblinking eyes.

“You speak my language,” it hissed at Harry. “If you understand me, please remove your light sticks.” Harry assumed he meant their wands, so he put his wand down, and signaled to Ron and Hermione to do the same.

“Yes, I speak your language,” hissed Harry back. “I need to know, have you seen any spiders around here?” The snake started at him for a moment. Harry knew that spiders feared snakes, so the snake should know if it had seen any spiders running from it.

“Yes,” it crackled at him.

“Where?” asked Harry.

“Where they always are at this time,” it said. “In the Moon Patch.”

“What is the Moon Patch?” asked Harry.

“It is in the middle of this place, this... forest. It is where the illumination from the ball of light in the sky is the brightest.”

“Thank you,” said Harry.

“You are welcome Harry Potter,” said the snake.

“How do you know my name?” asked Harry.

“Everyone in this place knows your name. You are the one who defeated the Dark Lord, you are the one who defeated his master, and you are the one who will defeat the master of him as well.”

“What do you mean, the Dark Lord’s master?” asked Harry. He didn’t think Voldemort had a master, and even if he did, he didn’t think he defeated him.

“You defeated him, the one your people refer to as ‘Voldemort’” said the snake. Now Harry was really confused.

“If Voldemort is the Dark Lord’s master, who is the Dark Lord?”

“The master snake, the basilisk,” it hissed. Now Harry understood. Animals didn’t consider Voldemort to be the Dark Lord, they thought the basilisks were. However, it was understandable, just one look at a basilisk’s eyes, and you would be instantly killed frozen for all eternity.

“Thank you again,” hissed Harry as he, Ron, and Hermione ran off.

“What did it say?” asked Hermione as they ran off.

“He said that the spiders are in the middle of the forest, in a place where the moon light shines,” said Harry, skipping the part about the whole Dark Lord and his master thing. Ron shuddered.

“Do we have to use the spiders?” asked Ron as they continued running. “I mean, can’t we just leave for Azkaban now?”

“No Ron,” said Harry. “If we leave now, there’s almost a one hundred percent chance that we’ll be seen, caught, and punished. We need to distract everyone.”

“Alright alright,” said Ron. They went a little further, and Harry suddenly saw a bright light creeping through a few trees.

“I think the clearing’s coming up,” he whispered. Harry was right. Within seconds, after working their way through countless trees and bushes, they came to a large clearing in the middle of the woods.

It was a sight to behold, Harry had never seen anything like it. Millions of spiders of all sizes ranging from that of a nickel to the giant one the size of an elephant were all dancing in perfect unison in a circle. They were all synchronously clicking their pincers

to create a very eerie tone. The giant spider in the middle was shooting a continuous stream of web into the air like a fountain. Harry recognized the giant spider as Aragog.

“There he is,” said Harry to Ron and Hermione, pointing to Aragog. Ron and Hermione nodded. The three of them were squatting behind a large bush and peering through a hole in it.

“What are they doing?” asked Ron.

“They praying to the moon,” said Hermione. “Since all spiders fear the basilisk, it seems like an appropriate thing to do.” Ron and Harry gave her confused looks, she just sighed.

“Don’t you know?” she asked them, knowing the answer. “The crowing of a rooster is fatal to a basilisk, and since the setting of the moon signifies morning, in which the rooster would crow, the spiders are performing a ceremony to ensure that it sets.”

“But, doesn’t the rising of the sun also go along with the crowing of a rooster?” asked Ron.

“Yes it does Ron,” said Hermione. “But, since spiders prefer the night, they see the moon as a more powerful deity and worship it instead.”

“Okay, enough babbling,” said Harry, getting more and more freaked out by their eerie ceremony every second. “We should creep around behind them, and then chase the big one in the middle up to the castle. Alright?” Ron and Hermione whispered “Yes,” and they started walking around the spider’s ceremonial circle, trying to be as quiet as possible. It was very strenuous and slow work, trying not to step on a single leaf, or say anything when your arm was pierced by a large thorn.

However, they finally made it to the other side of the spiders, the point from which they would begin their charge. Harry looked at his basilisk watch, and he suddenly felt nervous. Not nervous like before you’re about to say your lines for a play, present something in front of a class, or even right before a Quidditch game. It was nervousness like before you know you’re about to die. But, Harry reminded himself that he had to do this, and he suddenly felt confidence flowing through him.

“Okay, Hermione and Ron, I’m going to run out to them. As soon as I step out, aim your wands at my ring, and use the Engorgio spell. That should create a large enough basilisk to scare them away.” Hermione and Ron took out their wands. Harry stood up, took a deep breath, and ran out right into the middle of the spiders’ ceremony.

## **Chapter 16- The Return of the Phoenix**

It was pure chaos. As soon as Ron and Hermione used the Engorgio spells on Harry's ring, it immediately grew almost one hundred times its size, both in length and width. It shot out like a missile off of Harry's wrist, and it hit Aragog in one of his eight eyes as he was spinning. He stopped shooting silky web into the air, and let out a horrible scream. The surrounding spiders followed Aragog's example, and let out a series of scared clicking noises before they all quickly scurried off in various directions. Aragog, however, went in the exact direction Harry wanted him to go: right towards the school.

Harry tried to run after Aragog, but his eight legs allowed him to go much faster. The enormous ring was also becoming heavier every second, not helping Harry run any faster.

"I need some support!" he yelled to Ron and Hermione. They immediately sprang up to his side, and shot out some magical cushions underneath the basilisk. Hermione and Ron now sprinted alongside Harry, who was going much faster due to the cushions that drastically decreased the weight of the massive watch.

While he was sprinting, Harry had several near misses with trees, and every second something brushed up against him, and most of the time, it was not a soft thing.

"Ow!" yelled Harry as a giant thorn scraped his left arm. Blood started spilling out all over. He had to resist the urge to grab the wound with his right hand, that was the arm on which the watch was, and if he moved it, Aragog might change direction.

The closer they got to Hogwarts, the faster it seemed Aragog moved. The noise that Aragog made was like a stampeding herd of elephants.

"Light circle! Why have you forsaken us!?" Aragog called to the sky. His voice was like scissors opening and closing. Harry assumed he was talking about the moon letting a basilisk get to him. He hoped that this incident wouldn't hurt the spiders and their religion too much; they might give up all their beliefs just because of this one incident.

They soon were out of the forest, and Harry saw the castle just ahead.

"Ron!" yelled Harry. "You go to the left and make sure Aragog keeps going straight! Hermione! You go to the right!" They obeyed him, and split off. Each of them were shooting small sparks out of their wands keeping Aragog on the track of heading to the castle. The main entrance to the castle was getting closer and closer, and Harry could feel the running finally catching up with him. He was beginning to feel winded.

Can't stop now, Harry thought to himself as he was just a little more than five hundred feet from the doors. Aragog made a sudden swerve to the right, but Hermione shot some large sparks at him, pushing him back to the center. Suddenly, a thought came to Harry. Aragog was blind, he wouldn't know that there were doors in his way! He'd just slam

right into them, causing the entire school to come out and see himself, Ron, and Hermione.

Harry stopped running, about one hundred feet from the school. Ron and Hermione looked at him, but he signaled to them to keep going. Just before Aragog was about to hit the door, and was going up the stairs, it was time for Harry to act.

“Anigo Tora!” he yelled. A large yellow beam shot out of Harry’s wand, aimed at the door. It hit the handle, and the doors swung open, just a few seconds before Aragog would have hit them. Aragog ran inside the doors, and all that there was left to do was wait until he entered the Great Hall. When the doors shut, Ron and Hermione stopped running, and started walking back to Harry.

“Great jobs guys,” said Harry to Ron and Hermione. “Now all we have to-” Harry was suddenly cut off by an ear shattering scream that soon lead to hundreds more. It sounded like a torture chamber inside the school, screams were coming from everywhere.

“Oh, I hope no one gets hurt!” said Hermione as lights started shooting out of the castle. Some people were trying to stop Aragog with magic.

“We’ve got to go now!” said Ron. “Before our distraction wears off!” Harry nodded, and he took out his Firebolt from his backpack. He gave it to Ron and Hermione. Ron shrunk down to the size of a chameleon, and Hermione picked him up. She mounted the broom, nervously, and started going up in the air.

Harry, seeing that they were set, started transforming his shoulder blades into wings. He felt his bones expanding, and growing. The two large blobs on his back hardened, and then white feathers burst out of them, forming perfect wings. Harry flapped them once, to see that they were okay, and then shot off, getting right next to Hermione within half a second. Harry immediately decided that flying over the forest was far easier than running through it.

“You okay Hermione?” asked Harry. Hermione was shaking all over. Harry knew Hermione didn’t especially enjoy flying, and this time was no exception.

“Y- y- yeah! I’m just fine!” she stuttered back to Harry, keeping her face and eyes fixed directly ahead. Ron gave Harry a pint-sized thumbs-up too. So far, so good he thought. Harry took the map out of his backpack, avoiding hitting his wings which were flapping quite fast and powerfully. Looking at it, he saw that they still had a long trip ahead of them. The Forbidden Forest only took up a small fraction of the bottom of the map. Ahead there was a large body of water, another big forest, and then a giant green island which Azkaban was on. Harry put the map away, took a deep breath, and then continued on.

\* \* \*

They stopped flying when Harry estimated that they were about halfway to Azkaban. They had been flying all through the night, and several times, Harry felt as though he were asleep, but his wings were still flapping. Harry didn't want to take the chance that the next time that happened, his wings may stop flapping, and he'd crash to the ground.

They landed in a small clearing in a giant forest, and set up a small camp, just as the sun was coming up, and animals all around them were waking. Harry and Ron worked on getting food while Hermione set up some magical tents that Harry had brought. They were extremely compact, about the size of a small book when in their state of maximum smallness, but when they expanded, they could reach the size of a house.

Harry and Ron left Hermione to figure them out when they set out into the forest to try and find something to eat. They walked into the forest, wands out and ready to hit any animal that walked across their path. They just went a few paces in, when Ron asked Harry a question.

"Harry, do you think we're going to make it?" he sounded like a little child, wondering if "we were there yet". Harry, however, did not know how to answer, so he gave Ron a response that he would've given to a child that had asked that question.

"Yeah Ron, of course," he said. Ron smiled back, and returned back to his work.. But, Harry wasn't sure at all that they would make it. Even though they made it halfway to Azkaban, they still had the other half to go, and then they had to get inside, and they still didn't have a good plan on how to do that. What made them think they could actually pull this off?

Just as Harry was contemplating this, he saw something that looked like a large bird rush by him.

"Ron!" yelled Harry, pointing to where he saw the bird fly to. "Over there!" Ron's head turned just in time to hear the sound of it flying by some leaves.

"Let's go!" yelled Ron, running after the bird. "Man that thing is big!" They ran after the bird, shooting some beams of light at it, hoping to stun it then kill it on the ground. The bird was moving extremely gracefully, flying through the trees and avoiding them as if it were swimming very fast through a sea of air. Every time Harry got close to it, he felt warmer, and the closer he got, the more he had to back away to escape its extreme heat. The bird made a quick swerve to the left, and suddenly, Harry realized that he only heard one set of running footsteps: his own. He stopped in his tracks, and looked around for Ron, but he was nowhere to be seen. The large bird had gotten away.

"Ron!" yelled Harry. He lit up his wand, and scanned the area. He was still gasping for breath after chasing the bird, and the sweat on his head from the bird's heat was certainly not helping. Just then, Harry felt his foot slip into an immense hole. He just barely saved himself from slipping inside. Harry looked inside, and Ron was at the bottom.

“Ron!” Harry yelled to the bottom of the hole. “Are you okay?” Ron gave a low moan, and gave Harry a weak thumbs-up.

“Come on and get out,” Harry said. Ron slowly stood up, and brushed himself off. Harry gave Ron his hand, and pulled him out of the hole.

“When did you fall in Ron?” asked Harry.

“I don’t remember,” said Ron. “I just remember that the heat was really getting to me, then the bird turned to me, and it became unbearable. So I think I just... fainted.” Harry shook his head and sighed.

“Come on Ron,” said Harry. “Let’s go find something else.”

“Man, I really wanted that bird, it was so big,” said Ron, scouting the area again for some animal. They started heading back to camp, where hopefully Hermione would share some of her rations with them that she had brought. Just when they were about to get back to the clearing that they had landed in, however, Harry felt the familiar warmth again.

“Ron, do you feel that?”

“Yeah,” said Ron, wiping his brow which was already starting to get wet. Harry felt the heat getting more and more intense. “What is that bird?” The same thought was running through Harry’s mind, how was that bird producing heat?

Suddenly, a fireball flew over Harry’s head, searing his hair. Harry screamed, and frantically searched for something to put the fire out.

“Aquarius!” yelled Harry. A tiny sprout of water shot out of the tip of his wand like a small fountain. He poured it all over the top of his head, and there was a small ‘hiss’ as smoke flew out of his hair. Harry looked up and saw that what seared his head was not a fireball, it was a phoenix, only not a phoenix like Fawkes, it was a black Phoenix.

“Ron! Watch out!” yelled Harry, trying to warn him about the phoenix. But, his warning was too late, the phoenix had already seared Ron’s head as well, only it was far worse than Harry had had it, his entire head was on fire. Harry ran over, and shot some more water on Ron who was screaming and twitching on the ground. Harry soon heard the hiss of the fire being put out, and saw some smoke. He helped Ron up, and looked around for the phoenix, but it was nowhere to be seen.

“What was that Harry?” asked Ron, tending to a few scars on his face.

“It was a phoenix... a black phoenix.”

“You mean, those phoenixes that were created by Voldemort?” Harry nodded his head,

“I saw one before... it attacked Hedwig....”

“But what was this one doing here?”

“I don’t know,” said Harry. “But I know that we should get out of here as fast as we can, if that phoenix returns, we could be in trouble.” Ron nodded hastily in agreement, and they ran as fast as they could out of the forest, all the time wondering why the phoenix hadn’t finished them off then, and constantly darting their heads in all directions around them for any sign of it.

When they burst out of the forest, panting, they met up with a very confused Hermione who was wondering why they were out of breath and looking paranoid. She was standing around and tending to a very large fire that already had some of the food she had brought with her on it.

“What’s wrong?” she asked them as she threw another log into the fire.

“It’s after us!” yelled Ron, sounding insane, and, with his eyes darting all over, looked it as well.

“What is?” asked Hermione, starting to look slightly panicked.

“A black phoenix,” said Harry. This didn’t seem to help Hermione’s mood.

“What? A black phoenix? Like the one you told us about? Oh no Harry, oh no.”

“Listen Hermione,” said Harry, “as long as we can eat quickly, and get out of here soon, we shouldn’t be in any danger. I don’t think the phoenix was after us, it never seemed like it was directing its attacks at us, we just got caught in the crossfire.” Hermione looked slightly relieved.

“But why was it here in the first place?” asked Hermione. That thought never occurred to Harry, why was that phoenix there anyway?

“I guess, maybe... there’s just some left over from when Veldomert created them, and they’re wandering the world now,” said Harry. Hermione looked slightly satisfied with this answer, though not totally.

“So should we get started on breakfast then?” asked Ron, who already began eating some of the food that Hermione had set up. It was smelling quite good now, and it took Harry’s mind off of the phoenix for a while, especially after he tasted it. After flying all night, and worrying about a killer bird, a full stomach really helped.

After a non-black phoenix filled breakfast and nap, it was time to set off. Hermione compacted the tents again, and put them into Harry’s backpack. Ron shrunk down to the size of his chameleon, got with Hermione on the broom, and then shot off. Harry

sprouted his wings, took one last look around for any sign of the phoenix, and then flew off next to Ron and Hermione.

\* \* \*

It wasn't long before they reached the next stage of their journey, entering Azkaban. They flew all day, and seeing their destination finally appear, even if it was the condemned Azkaban, was a relief.

At first sight, Harry thought they had messed up and returned to Hogwarts. Azkaban looked exactly like it: an extremely large castle with many towers. Once they got closer though, Harry noticed several differences, first of which was a black outline around the castle. It looked like some sort of thin moat. However, upon closer inspection, it was revealed to not be water at all, but a long line of dementors.

They were all constantly moving all over, making them appear like black water. However, they were not making the soothing a quiet sounds of water, they were all making clicking noises as they moved, bumping into each other and going in all directions at once..

Suddenly, Harry felt the familiar chill coming from the dementors. He felt the happiness slowly flowing out of him, like he was dripping it out. He immediately started focusing on a happy memory, and once again used his feeling that he had on his date with Cho. Nothing else even compared to that feeling. The leakage of happiness felt as though it was being plugged up.

"Hermione, Ron, are you okay?" asked Harry. They hadn't had as much training in dealing with dementors as he had, and it was showing. Hermione had her eyes closed and was shivering, and the small Ron was doing the same. Harry decided it was time to take more serious defenses against the dementors.

"Expecto Patronum!" he yelled. A giant silvery cloud popped out of Harry's wand, and it quickly transformed into a large stag. It hovered next to Harry, and he felt no coldness from the dementors at all.

"Are you guys okay?" asked Harry to Ron and Hermione. The patronus had appeared to have helped: Hermione had opened her eyes and had stopped shivering and, from what he could tell, Ron had as well.

"Let's land over there!" yelled Harry to Ron and Hermione. He pointed to a small island off the coast of Azkaban's. They landed there, and Harry and Ron returned back to their normal forms. The patronus hovered next to them, bobbing up and down, as if waiting for a command.

“Alright...” said Harry. “This is it.” he pointed towards Azkaban and the sea of dementors that lay before them. “Any ideas on how to get in?” Hermione and Ron looked at each other.

“We never really did plan this part too well, did we?” asked Hermione.

“Well... erm... no...” said Harry. He felt really bad now, they always assumed they would get an idea on how to get in... but now that they were actually there... it seemed hopeless. Their entire trip so far would have been in vain if Harry didn’t think of something quickly.

“We could copy one, and then try to persuade it...” suggested Ron.

“No way Ron,” said Hermione. “We’d be lucky if we were able to copy one without arousing suspicion, and then for persuading it! Ha! Do dementors even speak English? And even if you could talk to it, what would you persuade it with? A kiss perhaps....” Ron and Harry shuddered.

Harry’s mind was racing, if that was the best idea they could come up with, then they were in trouble. He went over, in his mind, every spell he had ever learned, to see if any would help in this situation... but it was to no avail. Nothing would help them.

“We can’t go around them, they surround the entire place,” said Ron.

“We can’t go over them, that many dementors sucking the happiness out of you at once could practically kill you,” said Hermione.

“We can’t go under them either,” said Harry. “There’s no way we could make a hole from under the island and into Azkaban without arousing suspicion.”

Harry was suddenly brought of his thinking by his patronus. It was sniffing him.

“Get off!” said Harry, nudging the silver stag, but it wouldn’t move. Its nose was finding its way inside Harry’s pocket. “Get off!” Harry yelled again, slightly louder, and pushing him harder, but the stag would still not budge.

“Maybe it wants what’s in your pocket Harry,” said Ron. “Maybe you still got some food in there from the forest.” Harry reached inside, and heaved out everything that was inside. He examined it for anything that may have attracted the stag. All that was there, though, was a few quills, a spare ink jar, a few mirror-munchies left over, a few small candy frogs to give to Sirius and Lupin, and...

“Yes!” yelled Harry so loud that everyone, even the stag, jumped. “I’ve got it!” Harry threw everything to the ground, except the mirror-munchies which he held in his hand as though they were gold.

“What’d so great about those, Harry?” asked Ron. “They’re just some of Fred and George’s stupid candy.” Harry put a smirk on his face.

“Candy yes... but in this case... a tool. These candies will turn you into the closest living thing. So, if we eat one near the dementors, we’ll turn into one, and then we can just waltz our way in disguised as dementors!” Hermione and Ron’s eyes grew at least twice their size, and Hermione ran up and gave him a hug.

“Harry!” she yelled after hugging him. “You’re brilliant!”

“Don’t thank me,” said Harry as he passed out the mirror-munchies, “thank Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes.” Harry walked over to the stag, who was busy eating one of the chocolate frogs on the ground. Harry picked up the rest, and patted the stag on the mane.

“Thanks boy!” he whispered as Ron and Hermione started swimming over to the Azkaban island. Harry jumped in after them, and started swimming across as well. It was very difficult, especially with thick robes on. But, Harry eventually made it across and to the shore of the Azkaban island where the dementor’s noises were much louder. As they tried to suck the happiness out of Harry, he just kept reminding himself that he would soon be rescuing Sirius and Lupin, and everything would be good.

He kept reminding himself this all the way up to being face to face with a dementor. He looked over to his left, and saw Hermione with her candy out, and to his right, Ron, doing the same.

“We’ll eat them on three,” said Harry, bringing his mirror-munchy out of his pocket. “One... two... three!” Harry popped the mirror-munchy into his mouth.

## **Chapter 17- Azkaban**

The mirror-munchy seemed to be expanding in his mouth. It withered its way down his throat like a snake, and landed in his stomach like a ball of lead. Harry collapsed to the ground under the extreme weight, and clutched his stomach which now felt like a giant slimy mass. It was growing larger and larger inside him, until it couldn't fit inside his anymore and the suddenly, it began coming out.

"It's leaking out of my pores!" yelled Hermione as clear liquid started flowing out of her. "It's coming out of my skin!" The same thing was happening to Harry, clear liquid was coming out of his skin all over.

"Don't worry Hermione!" yelled Harry, trying to stay calm. "It's probably just part of the process!" But Harry was not feeling to sure of this, the liquid was pouring out at an even faster rate, with more and more.... Only it wasn't falling onto the ground, it was staying on his skin, like some sort of lotion. Harry was quickly covered in this fluid, and then he felt his body go rigid. The liquid, starting at his feet and working its way up, was changing color and texture, it was turning into black cloth.

The liquid kept changing, all the way up to Harry's head. Instead of having his face turn into black cloth, however, Harry felt his face contort into what looked and felt like pimply sandpaper, the skin of a dementor. As the transforming skin reached his eyes, Harry retained them. This was odd, he thought, but then he remembered that Fred and George had made a mistake so that you kept your original eyes. He must have looked very odd, thought Harry to himself, a horrible dementor with bright green eyes.

As Harry felt some black cloth fall over his head, which was what he assumed was a hood, he felt his body become un-rigid. He got up to his feet (or what felt like feet, though Harry was sure he was floating in air) and tried to find some sign of Ron. But as he got up, a totally new sensation came over Harry, a new sense. He could sense happiness, joy, sadness, and death. Harry took a breath, and didn't feel air rushing through him, but warmth. The warmth of happiness. He could feel it flowing through his veins, and all throughout his body. It was a feeling that could only have been compared with Cho's kiss, but this, Harry thought, was even better.

Harry longed for another breath of pure joy, and he inhaled deeply. Only, this time, less joy spread throughout him. It was like taking a single short gasp rather than a long deep breath. Harry suddenly felt almost suffocated, he had to breathe in some joy. Harry ran frantically around, joining the mass of dementors, getting short gasps here and there, trying to feel full of it. All that mattered in life was sucking in happiness... nothing else... nothing else.... Harry suddenly felt a hand on his shoulder.

He turned around, and saw a brown-eyed dementor, whose eyes he recognized as Hermione's. He shoved her off with a scabby hand, and returned to the mass of dementors, trying to suck in whatever happiness he could. Harry then felt two sets of

arms on him, and saw that Ron had evidently assisted Hermione in attempting to subdue him. How was it that they were able to resist... breathing?

"Get off! I need to breathe!" yelled Harry, only it came out as a series of clatters and clicks through his fanged and pimply mouth.

"Come with us," said Hermione, also as a sequence of odd noises, but Harry understood it as if she had spoken it in English. They pulled Harry back a little, while he was gasping for breath, barely able to get a whiff of joy, it was getting harder and harder to breathe. He couldn't take in any air! He was suffocating.

Just when Harry thought he was going to asphyxiate, he felt a massive sense of happiness go through him, just like the first breath he had taken. He let it go all the way though him, and then exhaled cold and unhappy air. Wondering where this source of joy came from, Harry looked around for the source, and he saw the Stag Patronus. The closer Harry got to it, the more joy he felt flowing through him with every breath. Ron and Hermione were taking chattering breaths near it as well.

"Why isn't the patronus driving us away?" asked Harry. Patronuses were supposed to drive dementors away, not attract them.

"Well, we're still not sure," said Ron, stroking the Patronus and drawing a deep breath. "But we think that they only drive dementors away because Patronuses are like too much of a good thing for them, and since they don't know what they are because they can't see them, they get scared, and go away. But since we can see it and know what it is, it doesn't affect us." Hermione shook her head, as if disapproving of his too simple theory.

"Oh well, let's go in," said Harry. "It's time to rescue Sirius and Lupin!" Ron and Hermione floated over to him, and Harry immediately noticed a problem.

"What are we going to do about our eyes?" asked Harry. "I'm sure any non-dementor guard will notice something is wrong with them."

Hermione sighed, and pulled her hood down, covering most of her face, including her eyes. She looked exactly like a dementor should.

"Common sense Harry, common sense!" she said, waving a crusty finger at Harry. Ron and Harry pulled their hoods down, just enough so that they could see, but enough so that people couldn't see them.

"So let's just nonchalantly float in, find Sirius and Lupin's cell, and then rescue them. Got it?" said Harry as all three of them formed a line. They nodded, and started working their way through the sea of dementors. After a few bumps and crashes, they came to the entrance of Azkaban. It was a huge door, at least the size of a bus, and it was made of a heavy dark metal. On the front, there were deep red words carved in, the letters were

curved and pointy all over. The characters looked more like torture devices than letters of the alphabet.

“All hope abandon, ye who enter here,” read Harry off of the door. “Sounds like a nice place, let’s go in.” He gave the doors a slight push, and to his surprise, they swung open, revealing a large open room. It was a pure-white room, except for one small brown desk in the middle, with a small bald man sitting at it, and several holes in the wall, appearing to be randomly scattered.

“Let’s stun him, and see if we can find some papers that say where Sirius and Lupin are,” said Harry. Ron and Hermione agreed, and started to take out their wands. Then, suddenly, to Harry’s surprise, the man stood up, and walked over to them, smiling. Harry saw that what he thought was a bald spot was actually a metal piece.

“Oh good, you’ve finally arrived,” said the man to the three of them. Harry was very confused, were they expecting him? Then, he suddenly felt panicked, did they know what their plan was? “I must say, though, you were very quick to ship here... not that I have any complaints about that.” Then it hit Harry, the man evidently thought that the three of them were an order of dementors from some company.

“This way please!” said the man. He mounted a broom, and started to fly up into the air, and towards one of the holes in the wall. Harry floated up with him, and Ron and Hermione followed. It’s just like walking, Harry thought, as he instinctively moved his tentacle-like legs that allowed him to hover.

They entered the hole, which had a sign at the entrance that read “Suicidals: Guard With Extreme Caution”, and the most terrible sight Harry had ever seen came before his eyes. The hole was an entrance down a hallway that didn’t seem to have an end. It was like a tunnel that someone who had a near death experience might see, only this tunnel did not end in any light, it was almost pitch black the entire way down. The only sounds were that of water (at least, what looked like water) dripping and moans, with the occasional scream. Dirty and skinny hands were protruding through the bars that separated the prisoner’s cells from the hallway. When Harry saw whom one of the hands belonged to, he thought he was going to be sick. A man with only one arm and half a leg stared back at Harry with his one good eye. His other was bloodshot and extremely inflamed. His skin was a deep green, and he had almost no hair left, unless you counted his extremely long beard that had bugs crawling in and out of it. The man suddenly threw up what looked like blood, and it hit the ground with a large splat. A group of rats immediately came up to the pile of bloody vomit, and started eating whatever was in it. The man picked one of the rats up, and bit its head off with a large crunch.

Harry turned his face away from the man, he knew Azkaban was supposedly terrible, but never knew it could possibly be this horrific. As Harry hovered down the halls, and saw several more dementors, floating around, causing screams wherever they passed, only one thought came to Harry’s mind.

“This is Hell,” he thought to himself as they passed another man who was desperately trying to keep his only eye from dripping out of its socket by holding it in with a spoon. They came to the end of the tunnel, and reached an intersecting hallway. The man turned right, and Harry followed, along with Ron and Hermione. This was another tunnel like the one they had just left, only this one had a sign that read: “Newcomers”. The man stopped there, and turned to the three of them.

“Alright, we’re short on dementors in this section, and I need you three to guard this hallway,” he said. Then he gave them a smile, “This section is like a gold mine for you though. All the newbies usually have many fresh, happy memories for you. Especially these two we just got in about two months ago, they’re still pretty good. They both claim they’re innocent, and if you could maybe do them a bit more to break them down, that’d be great.” He shot off of his broom, and was soon out of sight. Harry, Ron, and Hermione looked at each other.

“Do you think that those two new ones he was talking about are Sirius and Lupin?” asked Ron.

“I think so,” said Harry. “He said he got them in about two months ago, and that’s when they were found guilty. Let’s look for them.” Harry shot ahead of them, and started looking in each of the cells. These prisoners didn’t look as though they had it as bad as the suicidals did. Most of them looked half-way decent, though they were huddled up in a corner of their cell, crying and shaking. Harry saw none that were standing up or sleeping, a sign that would tell him who Sirius and Lupin were; since they thought they were innocent, they’d retain their sanity, but the torture that Azkaban gave them would still make them almost unrecognizable.

Harry heard Hermione call for them, though it wasn’t a human yell, it was a very high pitched click. Harry and Ron ran over to her. She was pointing at a cell that had two people inside. One was writing something on the wall, and the other was standing there watching him. They both appeared malnourished, looking like little more than skeletons. Immediately, the one watching the other one write on the wall looked at Harry.

“Hey look Sirius, they’ve sent us some more to try and break us down! I guess they really want us gone, don’t you?” He gave a weak laugh. Harry tried to hold his breath, he didn’t want to suck any happiness out of them.

“They are Sirius and Lupin!” yelled Ron.

“Oh, talking to your friends now, on how to best destroy our minds? Well, I tell ya, nothing you do will work, nothing!” yelled the same man again. When Harry tried to mentally erase some of the bruises all over his skin, the huge bags under his eyes, and added a bit more weight to him in his mind, he came up with a perfect image of Lupin.

This was going to be difficult, thought Harry. How could they talk to them when they were dementors? Lupin glared at him, and Harry decided that a good way to start

showing them who they were would be to prove that they weren't really dementors. Harry lowered his hood, and Lupin stepped back in surprise.

"Hey Sirius!" yelled Lupin. "Come and tell me if I'm crazy! Does that dementor have... eyes!?" Sirius stopped writing on the wall and came over, his eyes opened wide.

"Those aren't just any eyes Lupin, those are Lily's eyes!"

"Lily? Lily! Is that you?" asked Lupin, shaking the bars of the cell. Sirius came over and began shaking the bars as well, and banging his head against them as well. Both of them were going to kill themselves if the situation they were in did not improve.

"Epistrefus!" said Harry, taking out his wand and pointing it at himself. He felt the cloth and scabby skin all over him quickly turn back into the clear liquid and then it all fell off of him and onto the floor creating a large puddle that quickly disappeared. Ron and Hermione did the same. It was a very unusual and grotesque sight, seeing someone's skin fall off like water. Sirius and Lupin must have thought this as well, because they were both gaping at the three of them, lost for words.

"H- H... Harry?" stuttered Sirius.

"Yes Sirius, it's me," said Harry in a defiant tone. "We're here to rescue you."

"Harry!" yelled Lupin, suddenly snapping back into reality. "You shouldn't have come! You are in extreme danger!"

"Oh, don't worry," said Harry. "We got past the dementors and everything easily." Sirius shook his head.

"The dementors are the least of your worries Harry," said Sirius. "There's going to be an invasion here... today!"

"An invasion?" asked Harry, confused. "By who?"

"Voldemort!" yelled Lupin. Hermione and Ron flinched at the sound of the name.

"What do you mean?" asked Harry.

"The dementors," said Sirius. "They've been talking about it for weeks now. They're getting excited, they can sense him coming, and they are more than willing to join him."

"You can understand them?" asked Harry.

"A translation charm," said Lupin. "I made a wand out of the food and trays they give us. Every now and then they give us some dragon spice to put on our food. While not nearly as powerful as dragon heartstring, phoenix feather, or unicorn hair, it suffices." He took

out a very crude wand from his pocket. “It’s definitely nothing spectacular, but it can do some basic stuff.”

“Why didn’t you tell any of the human guards?” asked Hermione.

“Ha!” said Sirius, his arms folded. “You think they listened to us? We tried, of course, but they thought we were just trying to come up with an excuse for them to let us out of here.”

“So get out of here Harry!” said Lupin. ‘We’ve got a pretty good escape plan right now (he pointed to the writings on the wall) and we don’t want you to get hurt when we try it.’ Harry felt distraught, he had traveled all this way, and they didn’t even need or want his help.

“Not that we’re not thrilled that you’re here Harry,” said Sirius, giving a very thin and weak smile. Harry felt his spirits lift a little. “The fact that you got passed the dementors and guards proves that you are a magnificent wizard.”

“So how can we get you out of here?” asked Harry. Sirius and Lupin both pointed to a small hole in the wall that had a small white orb in it. There were bars covering it.

“That little ball is the key to opening the cell,” said Lupin.

“The key is right there?” said Hermione, sounding amazed. “Right where almost anyone can get at it? You’d think they would make it a bit more secure than that....”

“They don’t need to, Hermione,” said Sirius. “Most prisoners here don’t even need bars to keep them in. Why waste governmental money on more security when you can get the same result for less?”

“Yeah, I guess so,” said Hermione.

“Anyway,” continued Lupin, “my wand isn’t good enough to perform a transportation charm yet, but yours is.”

“A transportation charm?” asked Harry, not knowing what it was.

“It can move objects short distances as if they apparated,” said Sirius. “Just point to the orb, say ‘Ela Grigorus’. The orb should pop out of the cage and to you.” Harry turned to the small cage in the wall, cracked his neck, and took out his wand, pointing it at the orb. Sirius and Lupin were as good as out.

“Ela Grigorus!” he yelled. The orb shook violently for a second, then it appeared in Harry’s hand.

“Excellent Harry!” said Sirius. “Now, put the orb in here, and get ready to go.” He pointed to a small hole next to the bars of the cell. It was the exact size of the orb, and Harry put it snuggly into it. The bars of the cell immediately vanished, and Sirius and Lupin ran out. Harry took the orb from the hole, and the bars appeared again. He performed the transportation charm on it, and put it back into its cage.

“Great job Harry,” said Sirius, beaming at him with extremely bloodshot and baggy eyes, just like Lupin.

“Now, how do we get out of here?” asked Harry.

“Oh, that’s the easy part,” said Sirius. “All we have to do is—”

Sirius was cut off by a violent explosion that seemed to come from everywhere at once. The sound of it was deafening, and Harry could feel the heat of it coming from all around him. He heard screams coming from every direction, and heard beams being shot from wands. High, cold laughs followed each shot, along with huge explosive noises. Smoke began flowing throughout the halls, and right up to the five of them.

“It’s begun!” said Sirius.

“Go go go!” yelled Lupin, pushing Harry, Ron, and Hermione along the smoky corridor. He was shooting something out of his homemade wand that made the smoke part a little, but it was still almost overwhelming.

“Where are we going?” asked Harry, coughing, and putting his hand over his mouth.

“Well, we had originally planned to go out through the main entrance, but since Voldemort’s here, we don’t stand a chance of surviving if we go that way... whoa!” Lupin tripped over a body on the floor. He quickly got back to his feet, and brushed himself off.

“That’s Jack, this corridor’s human guard,” said Sirius. “If he’s dead, Voldemort, or at least one of his servants, is around here somewhere.”

“Then we have got to get out of here quick!” squeaked Hermione.

“My idea exactly!” said Sirius. He was reaching into Jack’s pocket, and he pulled out a small leather bag.

“What’s that?” asked Ron, trying not to cough.

“Floo powder,” said Sirius. “Azkaban’s corridors are linked through a system of fireplaces. Since you can’t Apparate inside, the guards use Floo Power to get from one place to another quickly.”

“So what?” asked Ron through a cough.

“Come on Ron, use your brain,” said Harry, catching on to what Sirius was talking about. “We can use the powder to get out of here! We can use the Floo Powder to go right back to Hogwarts.”

“Exactly!” said Lupin, taking a handful of multicolored powder from the bag. “Now all we need is a fireplace. Scout around for one!” Harry, Ron, and Hermione started walking down one direction of the corridor, and Sirius and Lupin started down the other.

“See anything?” asked Harry.

“I can barely see my hand in this smoke,” said Hermione.

“There’s no way we can find a fireplace in this!” said Ron. They wandered the hallway, trying to ignore the smells of the dead bodies around them. Suddenly, Harry heard footsteps coming from the opposite direction. They were coming closer and closer. Harry spun around, and took his wand out, the steps were coming faster now. Whoever was coming, it couldn’t be anyone good, Harry had to do something.

“Stupefy!” yelled Harry. A beam shot out of his wand, and he heard one of the bodies hit the floor. The other body stopped running, and started dragging the other body. It soon came into focus who it was. It was Sirius.

“Harry! What did you do!” he yelled as he dragged Lupin’s body behind him. Harry felt like an idiot. “They’re right behind us! Run!”

“Who’s behind us?” asked Harry.

“Some Death Eaters and dementors,” said Sirius as he picked up Lupin’s body, swing it over his shoulder, and started running with it.

“They’ve already recruited them?” asked Harry, running.

“Oh yeah,” said Sirius. “Voldemort brought some fresh people with him, and the dementors just lapped them up. They joined him immediately afterwards when he said he could give them even more.... Did you find a fireplace?” Harry was about to answer when Hermione interrupted,

“There’s one!” she yelled, pointing straight ahead. At the intersection ahead there was a giant and very elegant furnace. It seemed to be made out of black marble, and was intricately carved with demonic figures that seemed to be popping out of the fireplace. The four of them stopped in front of it. Sirius took the bag of Floo Powder out of his pocket, and opened it. He took out a handful of the multicolored powder and offered it to Harry.

“Go Harry, take it and go back to Hogwarts!” Harry was about to take it when a thought came to him.

“No, you go Sirius. Lupin needs immediate attention, a second’s delay may make a difference.” Sirius looked for a second as though he was going to say something against Harry’s statement, but instead shot a flame out of his wand and into the fireplace. He threw the powder into it making it turn green, and then gave the bag to Harry.

“Don’t send me any owls Harry, I don’t want any risk of being caught. We think we’ve found the location of the last phoenix, but we’re not sure. We’ll contact you.” He nodded at Harry, and yelled into the flames. “Arabella Figg’s House”. He stepped into the flames and disappeared.

The ceiling above Harry, Ron, and Hermione began to shake and stones fell from it. The smoke was thickening with the collapsing causing dust to fly everywhere. Harry quickly took some powder out of the bag, and threw it into the fire. Hermione and Ron came up to the flames.

“Hogwarts, Gryffindor Common Room!” yelled Hermione as she stepped into the flames and disappeared. Ron did the same, and Harry was left alone.

“Hogwarts, Gryffindor Common Room!” he yelled as he stepped into the warm flames. The world around him melted away into a black oblivion, and it started spinning very fast. Then, just as soon as it started, Harry found himself in a large room. After he recovered from his dizziness, he looked around.

“This is not Hogwarts.” Was the first thing to cross his mind. The room he was in was large, but it looked nothing like any Hogwarts room he knew of. The room was very dark, except for a few fireplace-shaped torches that were lit in the corners. There were old and dusty statues of witches and wizards all over, stacked on top of each other, as if no one cared about them anymore. From behind one of them, a dark figure appeared.

“Ron, Hermione? Is that you? How did we get down here?” he called out to the figure, but it did not respond. It continued to climb over the statues and come closer Harry realized it couldn’t be Ron or Hermione, it was far too tall. “Who are you?” Harry called out, both hoping to get and not to get a response. He didn’t get one.

The large dark figure stopped moving when it was a few feet away from Harry. It stood up in front of him, and crossed its arms. Its hood magically lowered itself, and Harry saw before him Wormtail.

“So, Harry Potter… we meet… yet again…” hissed Wormtail through a very wide smile. “My master will be very pleased when he discovers that I have you.”

Suddenly, Harry remembered that the fireplace behind him was still lit. He quickly threw some Floo Powder into it.

“Hogwarts, Gryffindor Common Room!” he yelled, getting ready to step back into it. The fire quickly turned green.

“Oh no you don’t! Aquarius!” yelled Wormtail. Just as Harry had stepped one of his feet, not the fire, it was immediately put out by the water that Wormtail created. All of Harry’s hope went out in a quiet ‘hiss’.

“You can’t kill me Wormtail,” gasped Harry, trying to recover from his failure. “You may look stronger now, but I knew that inside, you’re still the little weak man that turned in my mom and dad.”

Wormtail gave quick laugh and shook his head.

“Harry, Harry, Harry...” he said, “you misunderstand my intentions. If I wanted to kill you, you would have been dead long ago. Accept the fact that I have not subdued you as a good intention. You see, my master no longer wishes to kill you... he wants you to join us.”

“Never!” yelled Harry immediately. “I’ll die before I’ll ever join you!” Wormtail laughed again.

“Oh Harry, there are far worse things than death...” he snapped his fingers, and several more cloaked figures entered the room, Voldemort’s servants, the Death Eaters. All of them, including Wormtail, formed a circle around Harry. Harry recognized some of them: Lucius Malfoy, Macnair, Crabbe, and Goyle. There were a few more that Harry didn’t recognize, they must have just been rescued from Azkaban seeing from how they looked. Then, one member among them caught Harry by surprise.

“Professor Snape?” asked Harry, gaping at him. He was standing right next to Wormtail, as though they were best friends. What was going on?

“Ah yes, Severus...” said Wormtail. “He returned to us last summer. My master understood his delay in coming, he didn’t want to draw any attention to himself by leaving Hogwarts so suddenly. He has been very helpful to us, especially in accomplishing this Azkaban invasion.”

Harry immediately understood, Professor Snape must be working undercover... somehow. Harry didn’t have time to figure it out, he had to find a way out of this predicament.

“Anyway Harry,” said Wormtail, “back to business...” He snapped his fingers again, and some dementors rose from the ground, as if floating up through the floor, and into the room.

Harry immediately felt their presence, felt the coldness of them flowing over him, felt the happiness being slowly sucked out of him, he had to act now.

“Expecto Patronum!” yelled Harry. The silver stag shot out of his wand, and straight at the dementors. But, the dementors were not driven back. The stag did nothing to stop them. Harry then saw why they were acting this way: they had eyes. They did not have eyes like humans, but eyes like Voldemort’s, black and snake-like with red pupils. They were like black holes, appearing to be sucking even more happiness out of the air.

Wormtail waved his hand, and the patronus was gone.

“You see Harry? Lord Voldemort always rewards his faithful,” he said in an almost soothing voice. “Sight, Harry, is a very powerful gift. Imagine, all your life living in a black void, incapable of experiencing anything to its best. A dementors’ life is worse than those of its victims, at least they had happy memories. Dementors never had and never will have even one, until now....” His speech almost made Harry feel sorry for the dementors, but he quickly shook it off.

“Without your silly little patronus spell to drive them off, the dementors will be almost invincible,” hissed Wormtail. “Join us Harry, join us and my master will reward you like he has done to the dementors, like he will to the ones rescued from Azkaban. Join us Harry... and you will becomes more powerful than you could ever imagine...”

It seemed hopeless. Every second, Harry was losing more and more happiness, and the screams and terror inside his mind was expanding, almost to the point of being painful. He was tempted to give in, to join Voldemort... but he remembered what Dumbledore had told him at the end of last year... to choose what is right over what is easy. The memory of Dumbledore flowed through him, and he felt strong again.

“No, Wormtail... never,” he spat. Wormtail gave a weak laugh, shrugged his shoulders, and shook his head.

“I don’t think we’re seeing eye to eye here Harry... you see, I’m giving you no choice. You will join us.”

Harry had to escape... but how? Death Eaters were all around him, and Dementors were everywhere the Death Eaters weren’t. Then Harry remembered Snape, what was his role in this? Was he really with Voldemort, or was he just spying? Harry had to stall for some time to figure all this out.

“So where is Voldemort anyway, Wormtail? Is he too scared to show up at his own invasion?” Wormtail glared at Harry.

“This may be beyond your comprehension, Harry, but this little invasion here is nothing compared to the other business my master has to take care of. Covering it all up, gaining power, inventing new and more powerful spells, yes... he is truly a genius.”

“If he’s not here,” said Harry, “then how did the dementors get their eyes? Isn’t that too difficult of a spell to use?”

“By no means, no,” said Wormtail. “My master is great, Harry. He has found ways to make spells take so little energy that even a child could use the most powerful of them. However, even with this magical compression, there are some spells that he is unable to perform still, even with his own, personal massive amount of magical power. He still needs more.”

Harry shuddered at the thought of what those new spells could be.

“So Wormtail, how did you, that is Voldemort and company, plan all this out? I mean, entering and taking over Azkaban is no easy feat.” Wormtail gave Harry a small smile.

“It took much planning Harry, and much work. We first had to get a few dementors on my side. They planted magical explosives all over Azkaban so that when we came in, it would be announced in a giant chaotic explosion. Getting you, though, Harry... to come, was far more difficult.”

“What do you mean? I came here on my own will.”

“Oh Harry, kind people are so easy to manipulate, they are so predictable. My master blackmailed old Cornelius Fudge, and he made sure Sirius Black and Remus Lupin were sent to Azkaban. There was enough evidence to prove them innocent, so he had to take action. He knew that you would come to their rescue, he just didn’t know when. So, he sent out a few watchmen all over from Hogwarts to Azkaban, to tell him when you were coming. When one of them saw you, he immediately started making the final preparations, and then sent us in.”

“What about the fireplace thing? Bringing me here instead of Hogwarts, how did you do that?”

“That,” said Wormtail, “was actually up to me. I knew that you were too noble to let yourself through first, so all I had to do was wait for the last person to go through the fireplace, and then reroute the network to this room. So simple, and yet it worked so well.”

Just then, Harry noticed Snape. He was pointing a single finger, from under his robes, to one of the furnace-shaped torches in the corner of the room. Harry gave a quick glance at it, and then turned his attention back to Snape. He mouthed the word, “Floo.”

Harry understood. All he had to do was transport the torch over to him, quickly throw some Floo Powder inside it, and then just say the magic words. But was that torch, being so small and not even really a furnace, be hooked up to the Floo Network? Harry had to, for the first time in his life, trust Snape.

Even though this plan had so many variables where so many things could go wrong, it was nothing compared to the one he, Ron, and Hermione had just pulled off... well, that Ron and Hermione had pulled off anyway. After accomplishing that impossible task,

everything else seemed easy: including this one. Besides, it was Harry's only hope of escape.

Harry reached into his back pocket, and took a tiny bit of powder, barely a pinch, and held it between his fingers, getting ready to throw it into the torch. He had to wait for just the right time to do it.

"Well Harry, what is it going to be?" asked Wormtail. "Are you ready to go, and begin your life as one of the most powerful wizards on earth?"

"Well Voldemort, I've thought it over, and I'd have to say is... Ela Grigorus!" Wormtail gave him a confused look, but before he could say anything, the torch was in Harry's hands. He immediately threw the tiny bit of powder into the flame, and it turned green.

"Hogwarts, Gryffindor Common Room!" yelled Harry.

"NO!" yelled Wormtail, running towards Harry and trying to grab onto him. But, it was too late for him. Harry felt himself being shrunk, sucked into the furnace, and then returning to Hogwarts.

## **Chapter 18- Back To Hogwarts**

The world around Harry once again turned black and started spinning. Faster and faster, until he stepped out of a fireplace, and into another room. Harry quickly looked around, to make sure he was back at Hogwarts, or at least not back in that room with Voldemort.

To his relief, Harry saw he was in the Gryffindor common room. It was almost completely empty, except for two figures: Ron and Hermione. They immediately ran from across the room, and over to Harry.

“Harry!” yelled Hermione, sounding worried and looking as though she had been crying. “Are you okay?” Harry nodded, his mind racing over what had just happened.

“Where did you go Harry?” asked Ron. “You obviously didn’t turn up here, where did you end up?” Harry told them the whole story of how Wormtail had changed where his fireplace led, and what he had told him, about wanting Harry to join Voldemort. He told them about how Snape was there, and he told him to use Floo Powder to escape.

“So Snape was with them the whole time!” said Hermione.

“I knew he was no good!” said Ron.

“No Ron,” said Harry. “Snape has been working as a spy for Dumbledore.”

“Oh,” said Ron, looking slightly embarrassed. The large clock in the room suddenly struck two in the morning.

“Oh man!” said Ron. “We’ve got to get to bed! We have a Quidditch game tomorrow, Harry!” Harry made a grunting noise, and put his head into his folded arms. How could he have forgotten? How were he and Ron supposed to play their best while they were half asleep? Harry just hoped their clones had done a good job at the strategy meeting they were supposed to have last night.

“That reminds me!” said Harry, louder than he had hoped. “We’ve got to get rid of our clones!”

As if one cue, Ron and Harry’s clones came down the steps from their dormitories. They were both in their nightclothes, and looking extremely tired, rubbing their eyes.

“Be quiet will you?” yawned Ron’s clone. Harry, Ron, and Hermione stared at them.

“Oh no, you,” said Harry’s clone, walking over to them. Ron’s clone followed. Harry sighed, he remembered how hard this type of situation had been before, and was not anxious to go thorough it again.

“Listen, I know this will come as a surprise to you, but you guys are-”

“Clones?” asked Harry’s copy, his arm folded. Harry’s eyes widened, and he blinked several times.

“What? You mean… you know?”

“Of course I, that is… we know,” said Harry’s clone.

“How do you know? How did you figure it out?” asked Ron.

“Well, after you left, we started getting more of our memory back,” said Ron’s clone.  
“One of the memories was of you creating us, not us creating you.”

“To test the theory that we were the clones,” said Harry’s copy, “we used Prori Incanatem on my wand. Since spells and magic are not matter, they wouldn’t have been copied. The copies would have no prior spells, but the originals would. When an Engorgio spell, or any spell for that matter, didn’t come out, we realized the truth.”

“And, are you… okay with that?” asked Harry.

“Of course not!” said his clone. “Do you think we want to go? Do you think we want to die?”

“What do you mean die?” asked Hermione.

“Well, there can’t be two of each of you wandering around the planet can there?” spat Harry’s clone, looking almost furious.

“So only one set of us, the clones or the originals, can stay,” said Harry, realizing that getting rid of the clones was not like putting away a toy, it was like killing a fellow human. “I never realized….”

“Imagine,” said Harry’s clone, “being born, living for two days, then dying. What a life, huh?” Harry felt worse and worse every second, he wished he could have come up with some other way of not letting people know he, Ron, and Hermione were gone besides using clones of themselves.

“Well, there’s no other way-” started Ron.

“Shut up!” yelled Ron and Harry’s clones. “Just, shut up!”

“Well one of us has got to go,” said Ron, sounding annoyed, “and it’s not going to be us!”

“Oh, what makes you so special that you’re the originals?” asked Ron’s clone. “We’re the same as you!”

"No you're not," said Harry, understanding a large difference between them and the clones. "You said magic cannot be copied, right?"

"Yeah, so?" said his clone.

"That means my Order wouldn't have been copied into you," said Harry. "Unless you go and I stay, my mom won't be brought back to life, and she will be fair game for Voldemort to take" His clone looked as though he were about to make an argument, but then realized that Harry was right.

"You are correct," he said, slowly and quietly. "We are the ones who have to go." He walked backwards, up to the fireplace that Harry had just come out of. He put his hands up in the air, and closed his eyes.

"Do it," he said quickly and quietly.

"Do what?" asked Harry.

"Kill me, use the Killing Curse, make it quick," he said, not moving and not opening his eyes.

"What?" asked Harry, astounded. "I can't do that to you!" Harry's clone put his hands down, and opened his eyes.

"Well then, what do you expect to do?"

"I thought there would be some kind of spell, to make you go away, quickly," said Harry. His clone laughed.

"You just described the Avada Kedavra curse!" Harry, amazed at his own stupidity, banged his forehead.

"No, there just has to be some other way," yelled Harry. He didn't want to kill anyone, even if they weren't... anyone. Suddenly, the door to the common room opened. The room was flooded with light, and Professor McGonagall came in.

"Run! Quick!" yelled Harry at the clones, but it was too late, they had already been seen. Professor McGonagall gave a shriek.

"Potter! Weasley! Granger! What is going on here!?" she yelled at the three of them. They stared at her for a minute, and then Hermione's clone came down the stairs in her nightgown. She had her eyes close, and was rubbing one of them with her hand.

"What's all the noise for?" she asked. Then, looking up to see Harry, Ron, her original (Hermione) and Professor McGonagall, a look of fear came upon her face. She ran over to the Harry and Ron clones, and looked much more awake.

“Your situation did not just improve,” said Professor McGonagall to Harry. “Why are there two of you?”

“Well professor...” started Harry. He decided to go back to his original story that he, Ron, and Hermione had created them as copies for one of their dates to go with to a dance. Professor McGonagall didn’t buy this story as easily as the others did.

“There have been no dances announced Mr. Potter,” she said. “What made you think there was one?”

Harry should have expect that. Of course a Hogwarts teacher would know that there were no planned dances! Seeing that he was having trouble, Ron spoke.

“There was a rumor,” he blurted out. “A rumor that a dance was coming up. I guess our dates just wanted to be sure they had us!” He gave a weak laugh, and Harry and Hermione tried to join in, but they were too worried about what Professor McGonagall’s reaction was going to be.

“I cannot imagine anything more foolish than what you did,” she said. “After the spider attack two days ago, you would think that people would be more alert in what they do! How long have you had these clones?”

“Just a few hours,” lied Harry.

“Well then, no serious damage could have been done. Why are you making so much racket then?”

“Well, we realized that we have no way to get rid of them once we’re done with them,” said Harry. “We don’t want to kill them, and they can’t stay, so we’re stuck.” Professor McGonagall shook her head.

“You three, well... six rather, have no idea how many times this predicament has come up, especially in this school.”

“You mean this has happened before?” asked Harry, curious.

“Oh, countless times!” she exclaimed. “In fact, the year just before you three arrived, we had a situation exactly like this.”

“Well what did you do?” asked Hermione.

“We sent the clones off to the Ministry of Cloning of course!” she said.

“What’s that?” asked Harry.

“They keep clones of people there. They watch over them, and let them live out their natural lives as best they can. They sometimes change their appearance, and send them out into the world if they think they can handle it.”

“I don’t want to be sent to some kind of zoo!” said Harry’s clone. “Where I’m changed around and evaluated!”

“Would you rather die then?” asked Professor McGonagall. Harry’s clone immediately closed his mouth, and shook his head.

“Well then, we should try and get you out of here as soon as possible, we don’t want another panic. You three,” she pointed to the clones, “see me in my office in a few minutes, I will have the Knight Bus ready.” She walked out of the common room, but before she stepped out, “Weasley and Potter! Get to bed now! You have a game tomorrow!” She closed the door.

“Well then,” said Harry’s clone, “I guess this is goodbye.”

“I’m really sorry,” said Harry.

“No, don’t be,” said his clone. “While my existence may only be only a copy of another, I at least have an existence, and I can be thankful for that.”

That response took Harry by surprise, and he didn’t say anything as his, Ron’s and Hermione’s clone walked out of the common room to Professor McGonagall’s office. When the door closed, Ron gave a sigh of relief.

“Oh man, am I glad that went well,” he said.

“I can’t believe I didn’t remember about the Ministry of Cloning,” said Hermione. “Even though they’re not too well known, I still should have remembered. I guess I have to study my History of Magic more.”

Harry and Ron shook their heads, and walked up to their dormitories. Harry got dressed, and collapsed on his bed. As he did, he heard something crinkle, and dreaded what it was. He got up, and saw that he landed on a piece of parchment. Harry picked it up, and read it. It said: “I still know what you did, Potter, and you’ll pay for it tomorrow.”

Harry groaned, crumpled up the paper, and collapsed on his bed again, falling asleep almost immediately.

\* \* \*

Harry woke up to Ron’s violent shakings, and his yelling. By the time he finally got out of bed, he had only twenty minutes until their match against Slytherin. He had to endure Malfoy’s torments throughout his quick breakfast, and then ran down to the Quidditch

field. A few people were already in the stands, getting the good seats, and the rest of the Gryffindor team was there. The entire Slytherin team was on the other side, huddled together, producing some sort of strategy.

“Harry!” yelled George, brandishing an envelope. “This came for you just before we got here. It was on the ground.” He handed Harry the envelope, and Harry tore it open. It read:

Dear Harry,

How have you been? I haven’t seen you much since our date to Hogsmeade, and I would like to catch up on what we missed. After you win the match against Slytherin, meet me inside the Great Hall. We can talk about a dance that’s rumored is coming up, and the Dueling Club, which I am anxious to join.

Lots of love,

Cho

The letter was just what Harry needed. He immediately felt better about his match, and was ready to go. The promise of seeing Cho afterwards gave him renewed happiness.

“You okay Harry?” asked Fred, seeing Harry’s dazed expression.

“What? Oh, yeah! Let’s go!” said Harry, stuffing the letter in his pocket and walking out to the middle of the field. Marcus Flint came up to Harry from his side, and glared down at Harry. He was like a younger version of Hagrid. He was extremely large, bulky, and muscley, but he didn’t have any of Hagrid’s ever present warmth and joy.

“Shake hands captains,” said Madam Hooch, the referee. Harry immediately shot his hand out, and Flint grabbed it as if it was a bug he wanted to crush. He squeezed it so hard, Harry was surprised his hand didn’t explode. All the while, Flint had a smile on his face.

“Mount your brooms,” said Madam Hooch. Flint let go of Harry’s hand, and Harry started rubbing it to try and get rid of the throbbing pain. He mounted his broom, and the rest of the team came up next to him.

“One... two...” said Madam Hooch with the Quaffle, Bludgers and Snitch in her hands, ready to be thrown up, “three!” She tossed all three into the air, and Harry immediately shot after the Snitch, trying to stay with it, but it flew out of sight within half a second.

“What, is the Snitch too fast for you Potter?” yelled Malfoy from his broom.

“I didn’t see you anywhere near it Malfoy!” yelled Harry back, and zooming off before Malfoy could say anything. Just as he was flying away, though, he felt a sharp pain in the back of his head, as though a Bludger had just hit him.

“Ow! Fred, George, where are you?!”

“Sorry Harry!” yelled Fred, flying by. “I didn’t know we had to keep an eye on Quaffles too!”

“What?”

“That was a Quaffle that hit you Harry, not a Bludger and- watch out!” the Quaffle was zooming back towards Harry, and he just barely moved aside, doing it.

“What’s going on?” yelled Harry. Just as the Quaffle flew by him, it stopped, turned around, and shot back towards him. “There’s something wrong with this Quaffle!”

It was true, the Quaffle wasn’t going anywhere on the field except around Harry. It seemed to be trying to hit him, but that was what Bludgers were supposed to do.

“What should we do?” asked George, coming over to try and help.

“Hit it!” yelled Harry. George soared over to the Quaffle, which was on its way back to hit Harry, and whacked it with all his strength. But, for all the good his hit did, he might as well have used a feather. His bat did not stop the Quaffle in the least. It was still on a collision course with Harry.

“Keep moving Harry!” yelled Angelina. The entire Gryffindor team was surrounding Harry now, and the Slytherin team was gathered at the other end, laughing. “If you keep moving, it may not get you!”

Harry took her advice, and shot off in whatever direction he was able to go. The Quaffle chased after him, and it was not slowing down. What was going on? Harry looked through the entire Slytherin stands, to see if anyone was jinxing the Quaffle. He saw them cheering for Harry to fall, but none of them were keeping eye contact with the ball and muttering, a sign that jinxing is occurring.

Harry had to find the Snitch, and quickly. The Quaffle was speeding up, about to collide with Harry again.

“Having a bit of ball trouble there Potter?” came Malfoy’s voice. He was right next to Harry.

“I don’t have time for you Malfoy,” said Harry, quickly swerving to the side, getting away from him.

“Well, we have a rather dull game of Quidditch going on here,” came Lee Jordan’s voice. “Since no one is able to get the Quaffle, all eyes are on the Seekers, and- watch out Harry!”

The Quaffle shot forward and hit Harry on the side. He felt as though he was hit by a car. He could feel his ribs breaking, and blood spilling out inside him. It was far too painful to even yell. He clutched his side, trying to keep it intact, when the Quaffle came back for another hit.

Harry managed to avoid this one, but the pain from the previous one was still excruciating. Harry did, however, manage to yell, “Time out!”

Madame Hooch blew her whistle, and the two teams came to the ground. Harry wobbled over to his team, wincing with every step.

“Harry!” yelled Katie. “Are you okay?”

“No, not really,” said Harry.

“You should go to Madam Pomfrey, Harry,” said George. “We should forfeit the match.”

“No way!” said Harry. “I’m not losing my first match against Slytherin as team captain just because of a little internal bleeding. All I need is a temporary fix.” Harry took his wand out of his pocket and pointed it at his side.

“Osteo Repairo,” he said through gritted teeth. He could feel his bones rearranging themselves inside him, and the pain subsided.

“That should keep the bones okay, Harry,” said Alicia, “but you’ll need some help for the internal bleeding.”

“After the match,” said Harry quickly, he didn’t want to show any sign of weakness. He mounted his broom, and flew back up. The rest of his team and the Slytherins did the same.

“After a short time-out, the teams are back in the air,” said Lee. “Madam Hooch has replaced all the balls as well, that last Quaffle was a little insane.”

Harry breathed a huge sigh of relief at this announcement, the crazy Quaffle would no longer be in the arena. The game could hopefully continue as normal.

“And the Quaffle is in the air with... Slytherin in possession,” groaned Lee as the Slytherin crowd cheered. All Harry could do now was look out for the Snitch.

“The Slytherin team is nearing the Gryffindor goal posts, hurry up Angelina, steal the ball! Oh no! It’s too late! Ten to nothing, Slytherin.” The Slytherin stands cheered while Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, and Hufflepuff groaned.

Just then, by the Slytherin goal posts, Harry saw the familiar shimmer of gold, the Snitch. But, he was distracted by Lee’s announcement:

“What’s going on? The Quaffle is going in and out of the Gryffindor goal posts! Twenty to nothing, thirty... what’s going on?”

Harry looked over at the opposition of the field. The Quaffle was going in and out of the same Gryffindor goal, scoring Slytherin ten points each time.

“Forty to nothing, fifty!” came Lee Jordan’s voice again. Harry had to catch the Snitch quickly, before Slytherin got too many points. He turned back to the Slytherin goal posts, and saw that the Snitch was still there, hovering in the same spot, as if watching the match.

“Sixty to nothing!”

Harry shot towards the Snitch, it was pretty far away, would he get there in time?

“Seventy to nothing!”

Harry was getting closer...

“Eighty to nothing!”

The Slytherin Keeper had just noticed Harry coming in.

“Ninety to nothing!”

The Keeper flew towards Harry, trying to block him.

“One hundred to nothing!”

Harry made a quick direction change to avoid the Keeper.

“One hundred ten to nothing!”

He shot past the Keeper, and could almost reach the Snitch.

“One hundred twenty to nothing! Do something Gryffindor!”

Just as Harry was about to grab the Snitch, it moved slightly to the side.

“One hundred thirty to nothing!”

Harry turned to the right, and one of his fingers touched the cold, hard, Snitch.

“One hundred forty to nothing!”

Harry’s fingers wrapped around the round Snitch. He felt it flutter and vibrate and try to get free, but Harry held on to it tight.

“What’s this!? Harry Potter’s caught the Snitch!” yelled Lee Jordan. The Gryffindor stands erupted into applause. “Gryffindor wins! Gryffindor wins! One hundred fifty to one hundred forty!”

Harry soared to the ground and held the Snitch high in the air. The rest of the Gryffindor team came running up to him and started cheering, “Harry! Harry! Harry!” The rest of the crowd joined in in cheering Harry’s name, everyone except the Slytherins anyway. The cheering continued all the way up to the Gryffindor common room where it turned into a party. Madam Pomfrey came into the common room, and tended to Harry’s room as quickly as she could. She mumbled something about youth and not caring about injuries properly, but Harry was too busy having fun to listen or worry about the crazy Quaffles too much.

Harry, both fortunately and unfortunately, had to leave early to go see Cho. He had to fight his way through the crowd in the common room to get to the door, and had to fight even harder to get through the door, people didn’t want him to leave.

But, he eventually did get through the masses, and quickly arrived at the Great Hall. Cho wasn’t anywhere to be seen, so Harry sat down at the Ravenclaw table to wait for her. Just when he sat down though, she came in.

It was as if she radiated an aura of beauty wherever she went, thought Harry as she came into the room. Even though she was in her normal black Hogwarts, and didn’t have any makeup on, or had her hair done in any special way, she was still the most gorgeous creature Harry had ever seen. How could someone as great as her like me? thought Harry.

She looked around the Great Hall, and when she spotted Harry, her mouth turned into a giant smile which she beamed straight at Harry. Harry gave a weak smile back as she ran over to him.

“Oh Harry!” she squeaked when she sat down. “Great job during the game! I can’t believe you got that Snitch so fast!” Harry didn’t know what to say, he didn’t want to say anything that would sound as though he was bragging since Cho was the Ravenclaw Seeker, so he just said,

“Thanks.”

“Harry,” she continued, “I overheard Professor McGonagall talking to Professor Dumbledore the other day. She said something about a dance, and a rumor, and something else, but... would you like to go to the dance with me?”

Harry was overcome with joy. He was going to go to the dance with Cho! But, then he thought, would there really be one? Was the dance rumor that Cho overheard just the story he had made up to get Professor McGonagall to do something about the clones? Either way, Harry was happy.

“Of course,” said Harry. “I’d love to.” Cho gave a small giggle.

“I can’t wait!” she said. “Now, about the Dueling Club you’re starting... I know you were in it before, so you’ve had more experience than me.” Harry laughed on the inside. The Dueling Club during his second year was little more than a joke. “Do you think we could get together after classes and practice?”

Harry was about to say yes when he remembered his Animagus lessons. He already had those after his classes.

“Um, how about a little later Cho,” said Harry. “I... uh... always have... lots of homework, what with the O.W.L.s coming up.”

“Okay Harry,” said Cho. “And about the O.W.L.s, don’t worry too much about them, they’re not nearly as difficult as people make them out to be. They mostly only test you on stuff you learned your fifth year.”

“I hope so,” said Harry. “So I’ll see you tomorrow, here, around... nine?”

“Sounds good,” said Cho as she and Harry stood up. Cho gave him a kiss, then walked back up to the Ravenclaw common room.

Harry ran back to the Gryffindor room, where the party was still going on, and showing no sign of slowing down. Harry found Ron and Hermione, told them about his new plans, and joined the party. Finally, at about midnight, the party was over, and people went to bed to get ready for school tomorrow.

Harry went to bed that night feeling as though he were the happiest person on Earth. He had just won a Quidditch match, he was going to the dance with Cho, he was going to probably be head of a Dueling Club, and Sirius and Lupin were free, looking for a phoenix to help Harry see his mom again. He collapsed on his bed, crumpling up and throwing out the note under his pillow without even looking at it. He was in such a good mood, he didn’t even want to try and risk it by reading the note.

## **Chapter 19- The New Dueling Club**

Harry woke up the next morning still feeling happy, and went down to the Great Hall for breakfast, eager to get back to classes. When he came down, he was surprised to see Malfoy and a few other Slytherins crowded around a newspaper, grinning. Shouldn't they be sulking about their loss?

"What are they so happy about?" asked Harry as he sat down next to Hermione and Ron.

"They're reading about the attack on Azkaban over the newspaper," said Ron, biting into his piece of toast.

"I hope there's nothing in the article about us," said Harry.

"Don't worry," said Hermione who had a copy of the newspaper, "there isn't." She handed it to Harry. He read it to himself:

### Azkaban Attacked!

Last Saturday, the largest, and supposedly most secure, wizard prison in all of Europe was broken into and destroyed. Since there are no eyewitnesses to this crime, exact information is still sketchy. The only person, it seems, who knows what is going on is former Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, who admits to have been covering up attacks by You-Know-Who since last June.

"He'd been planning it for months," Fudge is to have said at his resignation. "You-Know-Who had communication with the dementors. He told them to plant explosives all over, to destroy the entire place, allowing his Death Eaters to just walk right in, and free his imprisoned followers." And that is just what happened. All criminals convicted of following You-Know-Who were freed, and are now wandering the country with him. All other prisoners are reported dead or missing.

The election for the new Minister of Magic will be held all day tomorrow. All ranking wizards are required to arrive, all other wizards of voting age are encouraged to come and vote as well.

"Cornelius Fudge resigned as Minister of Magic?" asked Harry after waiting a few seconds to take in what he'd read.

"Oh yeah," said Ron. "It's been all over the Wizard News lately."

"He admitted to covering up You-Know-Who's attacks," said Hermione, looking over her Transfiguration book. "He said his reason for doing it was so that there wouldn't be a panic, but everyone knows he should've said the truth anyway. We've lost a lot of time that we could've been using to get You-Know-Who and stop his attacks, especially the

Azkaban raid. The people were so angry at him that he decided to resign before he was thrown out.”

“So who’s going to replace him?” asked Harry.

“That’s what’s the election for,” said Ron. “I think the candidates are the head of the Improper Use of Magic Office: Mafalda Hopkirk, Dumbledore, of course, some other guy... Elbiret Mann, I think he’s the head of Invention of New Spells office, and some other guy... Zac Peeples I think... some nobody.”

“So who’s going to win?” asked Harry.

“Well, probably Dumbledore,” said Hermione, not looking up from her book. “Though Elbiret is a close match. He’s come up with some excellent spells that have saved people’s lives.”

“Ah yes, Elbiret. He’s the one who improved the weather charms to include raining cats and dogs, one of my most favorites.”

Harry turned around to see who was talking to him, and saw tiny Professor Flitwick.

“Oh hello professor,” said Harry, wondering why he was there.

“Harry,” said Professor Flitwick, “I need to talk to you about the Dueling Club meeting this Friday. I liked the idea you gave me the other day about having a tournament to see who the captain will be, and then having contests every week or so. Do you still want to do that?”

“Um, sure,” said Harry. His clone must have talked to Professor Flitwick about it.

“Oh excellent!” he said happily. “Just making sure, you know. Have to make plans to get this thing to work. Should be exciting!” Professor Flitwick walked away, skipping every other step.

“Wow, he’s really excited about the club,” said Harry, turning back to Ron and Hermione.

“Well, he was dueling champion at his time, I bet he wants to show off his skill again,” said Ron, finally finishing his breakfast. Just then, the ten minute warning bell rang, and Harry, Ron, and Hermione set off for their classes.

Compared to their adventure the last weekend, classes were downright dull. The only class that came close to the excitement they had was Care of Magical Creatures. Their dragons had grown considerably over the last week, and were now the size of large dogs. Harry’s Hungarian Horntail dragged him off the ground several times, and Hermione’s Transylvanian Three-Headed Terror was chaotic. Each of its three heads was constantly

biting and snipping at the others, trying to eat it off. It finally took a stunning spell from Hermione to stop them.

Ron's African Abysmall, however, was the most boring of all the dragons there. It was about two feet shorter than any other dragon there, and at least twice as wide. It reminded Harry of a dragon version of the old Dudley. All it did was sleep the entire class.

"Come on!" yelled Ron, poking his dragon with a stick. "Wake up!"

"Wow Weasley, I guess the theory that the animals picks the wizard is true. A pathetic beast for a pathetic boy."

"Shut up Malfoy," said Harry, using his usual comeback for Malfoy's taunts. Malfoy had Crabbe and Goyle next to him, and what looked like another bodyguard, his Hungarian Horntail. Malfoy's dragon was the biggest of all of the student's. It stood erect rather than on all fours, and its red and black body was extremely muscular. Its fangs were so large, when it closed its mouth, they still poked out. Its tail looked like a pitchfork, only much sharper. Malfoy was stroking its spiky back, getting a small puncture in his hand every now and then.

"Of course, my dragon here is proof as well," he snickered.

The bell for the next class rang, and Harry held back Ron as he was about to throw himself on Malfoy.

"Some day, some day I'll get him!" said Ron, holding himself back.

"Save your anger for the Dueling Club, Ron," said Harry. "You can get him then."

The rest of the day went by quickly, and before Harry knew it, it was time for his Animagus lessons. Since Harry had the wings down perfectly, Professor McGonagall decided it was time to work on transforming the rest of his body. By the end of his lessons, Harry could transform his arms, and part of his mane. Hermione could transform the top of her head into the horn, and Ron was able to get a tail, and he had changing the color of his skin to match his surroundings down pretty well.

Immediately after the lesson, Ron and Harry ran to the Quidditch field to squeeze in their practice. Since they were in first place, and their next game wasn't until before summer vacation, their practices weren't as important as they used to be. After throwing a few Quaffles around, and catching some Snitches, the team called it a night, and Harry headed to the Great Hall for his meeting with Cho.

For the most part of their meeting, it was Cho who was teaching Harry. She showed him hexes and spells he'd never heard of. She showed him the Maherius Hex that made the victim feel as though he was being stabbed in the location the spell hit; she showed him the Kano Micro curse that shrunk someone to the size of a mouse, and a really neat spell,

the Apendo Keros spell; it allowed the user to control the temperature of an area. The only spell that Harry taught Cho was the Disarming Spell, and he was surprised she hadn't known about it.

"I thought it was a basic spell," said Harry after Cho told him she didn't know it.  
"Wouldn't you have learned it in Defense Against the Dark Arts?"

"Did you learn it in that class?" she asked.

"Well, no."

"So then how would I know it?"

"I... don't know. I guess I just assumed that whatever I know, others do."

Cho just smiled at this answer, and Harry continued teaching her the spell. It was around ten when they both said goodbye, and went back to their rooms. Harry went to bed, relieved to not find any note on it, and fell asleep, thinking about how tomorrow would be almost exactly like today.

After what seemed like forever, the week was over, and it was time for the first meeting of the Dueling Club. All the tables in the Great Hall were pushed aside to make room for the sixteen members to have room to duel. Since there was no captain, Professor Flitwick would be controlling the first meeting. He put a charm on himself so that he hovered above everyone's heads.

"Good afternoon everyone," squeaked Professor Flitwick, flying about the room with a large wizard's hat in his hand. "I thank you all for coming here, and hope you are all ready for some good dueling fun! I have already put all of your names into this hat, and I will draw them out two at a time, and the two will duel with each other. The winner will keep his name in the hat, and the loser's name will stay out. Whoever's name is in the hat at the end wins."

"The winner of each match will be determined easily. Whoever loses their wand first loses. Either by disarming, grabbing it out, or even dropping it, it doesn't matter. Also, there will be absolutely no toleration of illegal spells, and if any are used, I will personally see to it that you are put away for life." Professor Flitwick's normally kind demeanor seemed to have gone away during that last sentence. His face twisted into an expression of meanness that everyone seemed to notice. But, it immediately transformed back into the kind expression that everyone knew and loved. Professor Flitwick did a little spin in the air, and put his hand inside the hat. He took out two pieces of paper:

"The first match is..."

The entire crowd was silent as he peered over the sheets of parchment. All eyes were fixed upon him, wondering if they would be first.

“Mr. Aylar Dumbledore against Mr. Fred Weasley!”

Harry gave a sigh of relief, and he heard others do the same. Then, as if by instinct, the entire club made a circle. Aylar and Fred stepped out of the circle, and into the center.

“Now, bow to each other,” said Professor Flitwick. Aylar bent all the way down, and Fred went down a little. It didn’t appear as though he were used to being formal.

“On my mark... one... two... go!”

“Expelliarmus!” yelled Fred.

“Bovini Magus!” yelled Aylar. The two spells met in midair, and it was clear whose spell was stronger. Aylar’s spell flowed into Fred’s beam, and it hit him. He started shaking, and turned a bright yellow. Then, something very odd happened. Fred grew tiny horns out of the top of his head, and his hands and feet started turning into hooves. His skin turned white, and his face became elongated. After a few shrieks of surprise, and giggle of laughter, it was evident what Aylar had done: he turned Fred into a cow.

“Moo!” said Fred when he was finally totally cow. Aylar walked over to him, picked his wand up from off the floor, and held it high in the air, as if it were a trophy. There was a little applause, and then Aylar changed Fred back into a human. He waddled over to Aylar, and picked up his wand from his hand.

“Thanks,” said Fred annoyingly.

“The winner of this round is Aylar Dumbledore!” said Professor Flitwick. He put Aylar’s name back into the hat, and threw Fred’s up into the air. It magically disappeared. Aylar and Fred returned to their spots in the circles, with Aylar looking extremely happy with himself.

“That’s a transformation charm,” whispered Hermione into Harry’s ear. “It’s incredibly hard to pull off. I’d bet he’s the first first-year ever to do it.”

“Our next contestants are... Mr. Neville Longbottom and... Mr. Ronald Weasley!” said Professor Flitwick. Harry gave Ron a pat on the back as he walked out into the middle of the circle. Ron and Neville bowed to each other.

“Three... two... go!”

“Poli Omihi!” yelled Ron.

“Stupefy!” yelled Neville. Neville’s beam shot right past Ron’s head, missing him, but Ron’s hit Neville right in the face. The light ray exploded into a million bubbles and tons of foam. Neville was blown backwards by it, and he fell over on his back, drowning in

the suds. Everyone in the circle was laughing. Ron walked over to Neville and helped him up.

Neville spat out some foam that was in his mouth, and gave his wand to Ron as a sign that he had obviously won. Neville walked back to his spot in the circle, trying to clean himself off.

“The winner is Ronald Weasley!” said Professor Flitwick as he threw Ron’s name back in the bag, and Neville’s into the air. Ron threw Neville’s wand back at him. Neville barely caught it.

“These rounds are going by fairly quick!” said Professor Flitwick. “This meeting may not take as long as I had thought. Anyway, the next match is... Mr. George Weasley against... Miss. Hermione Granger!”

Hermione put her head up high, and marched into the center. George walked into the center, not looking nearly as confident. They bowed to each other.

“Three... two... one... go!”

“Bona Nox!” yelled Hermione.

“Stupefy!” yelled George. Hermione’s black beam was much faster than George’s, and it hit him right in the stomach. For a second, it appeared as though the spell had done nothing.

“Help!” yelled George. “I can’t see!”

“Engorgio!” yelled Hermione, pointing her wand at herself. She immediately grew four times her size.

“Expelliarmus!” she yelled, much louder and deeper than her normal voice. George’s wand shot out of his hand, and right into Hermione’s massive fist. George, however, didn’t seem to notice. He was running around, unable to see.

“I’m blind!” he yelled after nearly smashing into Ron.

“Bona Lumos!” yelled Hermione. A yellow beam hit George, and he stopped running around. She tapped herself with her own wand, and shrunk back to her normal size. Hermione threw Fred’s wand back at him.

“Hermione Granger is the winner!” said Professor Flitwick. Hermione walked back to the circle.

“Why didn’t you just use the Expelliarmus spell first?” asked Harry.

“Because you should always disable your opponents first, then increase your power, and then attack them,” said Hermione. “I read it in *Dueling Do’s and Don’ts*.”

“Wow, what a surprise, you read it in a book,” said Ron, rolling his eyes, Hermione jabbed him in the side with her elbow.

“The next match is... Mr. Seamus Finnigan versus... Miss. Ginny Weasley!”

Ginny and Seamus walked into the center and bowed to each other.

One... two... three... go!”

“Expelliarmus!” yelled Ginny.

“Wingardium Leviosa!” yelled Seamus, surprisingly pointing the wand at himself. The Expelliarmus spell missed him as he flew into the air, going higher and higher.

“Ha ha! Can’t catch me!” he yelled from the ceiling. Seamus was up higher than Professor Flitwick now.

“Stupefy! Stupefy! Stupefy!” yelled Ginny, each time missing Seamus as he flew around. Ginny kept shooting more stupefy spells at him, but they were all missing, and doing no good. Then, she suddenly stopped.

“Petrificus Totalus!” she yelled, quickly spinning her wand in a circular motion. The beam, instead of staying a straight line, sprayed all over, so much that even Seamus couldn’t avoid it all; one of them hit him. Seamus went all rigid, and then fell to the floor with a loud bang, still frozen. Ginny walked up to him, and took his wand out of his petrified hand.

“Ginny Weasley is the winner!” said Professor Flitwick, flying about.

Ginny tapped Seamus with her wand, and he woke up from his frozen state. She gave him her hand, and picked him up, giving him back his wand. They both returned to the circle, with Seamus looking somewhat disgruntled.

“Wow, Ron,” said Harry, “Ginny’s really good!”

“Well, she is top of the class so far for the fourth years, so I guess he has to be good.” This remark took Harry by surprise. He knew Ginny was good, but he didn’t know she was top of her class.

“The next match is... Mr. Vincent Crabbe and... Miss. Cho Chang!”

Harry mouthed “Good luck” to Cho as stepped into the middle of the circle, not that she needed it. She was an outstanding student, and Crabbe was... not. Cho bowed to Crabbe,

but he barely moved his head, either out of wanting to be disrespectful, or because he was absorbed in Cho's beauty.

"Five... six... seven... go!" yelled Professor Flitwick, too excited to notice he said the wrong numbers.

"Eks-pehl-ee-arhm-uss," mumbled Crabbe, sounding out the spell as he went. Nothing came out of his wand.

"Maherius!" yelled Cho, much more confidently and quickly than Crabbe. The red beam hit Crabbe right in the shoulder. He immediately gripped it and let out a scream, dropping his wand in the process.

"Accio wand!" yelled Cho. Crabbe's wand flew right from the floor to her hand. Crabbe was now on the floor, gripping his shoulder for dear life.

"Miss Chang is the winner!" said Professor Flitwick, throwing Crabbe's name high into the air. Cho walked over to Crabbe, and dropped his wand on his stomach before she walked back to the circle. Malfoy and Goyle had to drag Crabbe back. It took him several minutes to calm down from the spell.

Cho smiled at Harry. As she did, a new feeling came over Harry. What would he do if he had to fight Cho? Would he lose on purpose and lose her respect? Or would he win and lose her love? Or would he try his best and have her still win, making him feel embarrassed?

Before Harry could think about it for too long, Professor Flitwick took the names for the next match out of the hat.

"The next competitors are..."

"Not Cho, not Cho..." thought Harry.

"Mr. Harry Potter!"

"Oh no, even worse..." thought Harry.

"Against..."

"Not Cho, not Cho..." hoped Harry again.

"Mr. Gregory Goyle!"

Harry breathed a huge sigh of relief. Ron patted him on the back, and Cho gave him an encouraging smile as he walked towards the center. Malfoy pushed Goyle into the center, whispering something in his ear and laughing.

Harry's immediate thought was that being in the center of circle, and viewing it from a first-person perspective, was a lot different than being on the outside and seeing it from a third-person perspective. He could see Goyle, right in front of him, with Malfoy directly behind him, a sinister smile on his face. Harry could see everyone around him and what they were doing: some were chewing gum, some were practicing spells, some had their hands in their pockets, rocking back and forth, and some were glaring right at them. It was very nerve wrecking. Professor Flitwick shot over between them.

"Ready... set... go!" he yelled.

"Slugus Arostos!" yelled Goyle, sounding better than Crabbe, perhaps because he wasn't fighting a girl.

"Kano Micro!" yelled Harry in reply. Just as Goyle's spell was about to hit him, he dropped on the ground, and did a forward roll, avoiding it perfectly. When he stood back up, there was no sign of Goyle anywhere.

"Where are you?" asked Harry, looking around.

"He's right there!" said Ron, pointing to the ground, causing everyone, including Harry, to start laughing. Where Goyle used to be, there was now a small bug with a wand next to it. Harry bent down to get the wand, and saw that the bug was a very small Goyle, jumping up and down, waving his arms, squeaking out incoherent words.

"Engorgio!" said Harry, trying to keep from laughing too hard. Goyle returned to his normal, but quite large, size. Harry gave him back his wand.

"Harry Potter is the winner!" said Professor Flitwick, spinning around, and tossing Goyle's name into the air. Harry walked back to his spot in the circle, getting some congratulations from Ron, Hermione, Ginny, and Cho.

"Our next match is... Mr. Justin Finch-Fletchley against... Mr. Sy- Syin... Tci!"

Tci walked into the center of the circle, looking extremely confident. He took his jacket off, and to everyone's surprise, and the girl's delight, he had no shirt on under it. Harry noticed he was extremely muscular, and he had several scars all over. What was the deal with him? Tci reached into the sheath on his back with his gloved hands, and took out his Swand.

The Swand was extremely beautiful. It had a golden handle with small rubies encrusted into it. The blade was quite long, and extremely shiny, with a small picture of a wand painted on it. The blade reflected the light coming in through the windows all over the room. Tci held it with both hands in front of him, down to his legs.

Justin walked into the ring, looking extremely nervous. He took out his wand, and held it in front of him, trying to look impressive too, but failing miserably.

“On your mark... get set... go!”

“Expelli-” started Justin, before Tci took over.

“Karthiaki Prosvolus!” he yelled so loudly that the room felt like it was shaking. He pointed his Swand right at Justin’s chest. No beam shot out of the Swand, but a spell seemed to have taken effect. Justin dropped his wand, and clutched his heart. His eyes were bulging out of his sockets, and the veins were growing all over his face. Sweat was pouring down his hair all over. He fell to his knees, still clutching his heart, as though it were going to explode.

Tci coolly walked over to Justin’s wand, and put his Swand up to it. He flicked his Swand, causing the wand to fly high in the air. Everyone, except Justin, watched it fly high in the air, until it started coming down. Faster and faster it fell... until Tci caught it in his hand.

“Tci is the winner,” said Professor Flitwick, but not as excitedly as he usually did. Professor Flitwick pointed his wand at Justin, and said something. Justin stood up, sweat still all over his face. “While that was an expertly use of the Karthiaki Curse, Tci, I would advise you not to use it again, it is far too dangerous.”

“Of course professor,” said Tci as he put his Swand back into the sheath, and put his jacket back on.

“Mr. Longbottom, will you please take Justin to Madam Pomfrey?” asked Professor Flitwick.

“Yes professor,” said Neville, walking over to Justin, and propping him up on his shoulder, carrying him to the Hospital Wing.

“Hey Tci!” said Harry.

“Yes Harry?” asked Tci, looking as though nothing in the world could have pleased him more than hearing Harry talk to him.

“What did you do to Justin?”

“I used to Karthiaki Curse on him,” he said. “It made him feel as though he were having a heart attack.”

“Oh, that’s... good,” said Harry. He now had to worry about facing Tci too. What other deadly curses did he know?

“Will Mr. Draco Malfoy and... Mr. Ernie Macmillan please enter the ring!” giggled Professor Flitwick. Malfoy rolled his eyes as he strutted into the center of the circle.

“I’ll show you how to do the Slug Curse properly, Goyle,” said Malfoy as he and Ernie took out their wands. Malfoy looked at Ron. “I’ve done it on Weasley before.”

“I hope I get to fight him...” fumed Ron.

“One... two... three... go!”

“Slugs Arostos!” yelled Malfoy before Ernie could even say a word. Malfoy’s green beam hit him like a truck. Ernie fell over backwards, and looked as though he was foaming at the mouth. After a few seconds though, Harry realized that foam wasn’t coming out of his mouth: it was slugs. Ernie stood up, but just as he did, a hundred slugs flew out of his mouth with a loud nauseating burp. They spilled all over the floor, creating a giant mess.

“Accio wand!” yelled Malfoy. The wand came out of the sluggish goo, and into his hand. He spun it around a few times, like an outlaw would do to his gun after winning a showdown.

“Draco Malfoy is the winner,” said Professor Flitwick. “Mr. Macmillan, please go to Madam Pomfrey.... She’s going to be busy tonight!”

Ernie nodded, and covered his mouth as another sickening gurgling noise erupted in his stomach. He ran out of the Great Hall, and another hundred slugs were heard splattering to the floor when the doors closed.

Professor Flitwick cleaned up the mess on the floor by just waving his wand. He put Malfoy’s name back in the hat, and threw Ernie’s into the air.

“The first eight battles are done,” said Professor Flitwick. “The next battles will be the winners of the previous rounds. Good luck to you all! Our first match up is... Miss. Ginny Weasley against... Miss. Cho Chang!”

Harry, once again, wished Cho luck as she stepped into the circle. Maybe he imagined it, but Ginny looked hurt that Harry hadn’t wished him luck. They bowed at each other, and Professor Flitwick started his countdown.

“Three... two... one... go!”

“Expelliarmus!” yelled Ginny.

“Locomotor Mortis!” yelled Cho. The two spells met in midair, each trying to force itself into the other. Ginny and Cho looked as though they were concentrating very hard, each’s eyes were fixated on the link of the spells.

Suddenly, something unexpected happened. At the point where the two wand’s spells were connected, there was a massive explosion. Colored lights and beams shot

everywhere. Harry, and most of the other people in the circle, ducked for cover. Those who didn't were blown over, causing a massive and chaotic mess. Then, after a few seconds, the explosions stopped.

"You can get up now!" said Professor Flitwick. "The spells have reversed their targets! Miss Chang's legs are frozen, but she has Ginny's wand, so she is the winner!"

Harry stood up, and clapped a little as everyone else was recovering from the blast. Professor Flitwick threw Ginny's name into the air, and put Cho's back in, getting ready to start the next round. He shot something at Cho's legs, and she could move again. Cho gave Ginny back her wand.

"Everyone, everyone! Calm down, the next round is about to begin!" He reached into the hat that had considerably fewer names than the amount it started with. "The next match is... Mr. Ronald Weasley against..."

"I hope it's you, Malfoy," whispered Ron, louder than he should've.

"Mr. Draco Malfoy!"

Ron, who was looking happy before Malfoy's name had been called, now looked almost sick as he walked to the middle of the circle.

"Be careful what you wish for Weasley," snickered Malfoy. "It might just come true! Ha ha!"

"I'm gonna get you Malfoy, you just wait..." Ron barely lowered his head to bow, and Malfoy didn't bow at all.

"Cats... hats... bats... go!" squeaked Professor Flitwick.

"Arachni Sorta!" yelled Malfoy.

"Megola Thagono!" yelled Ron. Millions of spiders shot out of Malfoy's wand, like a machine gun, only hundreds at a time. They were all locked onto Ron. But, a massive mouth came out of Ron's wand. It was like a human mouth, without any face around it, and it was at least fifty times the size. It started eating some of the spiders. Ron just blasted the few spiders that got through the mouth. He was faring better than Harry would have thought.

"Oplo!" yelled Ron. A small yellow sphere shot out of his wand, and it hit Malfoy, causing him to fall back.

"Tri Oplo!" shouted Malfoy. Three yellow orbs shot out of his wand, and hit Ron. He fell over on his back, clutching the spots where the orbs had hit him. Malfoy jumped to his feet, and pointed his wand at Ron.

“Asphyxiatus!”

Harry had never heard of this spell before, and was eager to see what it did. A small clear cube popped out of Malfoy’s wand, and landed on Ron’s stomach. It immediately expanded so that it was at least three times Ron’s size, and he was inside it. The box was also slowly but surely filling with a sand-like substance. Ron got up, just in time to notice what was happening: the box was filling up with sand, and he was going to suffocate. When it was up to his knees, he started banging on the sides of the box, but it made no sound. The box was filling much more quickly now, the sand was up past his navel now.

“Do you give up?” asked Malfoy, when the sand was up to Malfoy’s chest. Ron looked away from him, and started shooting sparks all over the sides of the box but they did nothing. The sand was up to his neck when he finally yelled as loud as he could, even though it was barely hearable through the box, “I give up!”

Malfoy tapped the box with his wand, and it immediately disappeared, sand and all. Ron collapsed to the ground, gasping for breath.

“Draco Malfoy is the winner!” said Professor Flitwick, throwing Ron’s name into the air. Ron waddled back to his spot in the circle next to Harry.

“I can’t believe I lost to him,” grumbled Malfoy. Harry didn’t say anything.

“Our next competition will be... Mr. Harry Potter!”

“Not Cho...” thought Harry again.

“Against... Miss. Hermione Granger!”

“Oh no,” thought Harry, that match up wasn’t much better. How was he going to fight one of his best friends? He and Hermione looked at each other, and walked into the middle of the circle. They walked to opposite ends, and bowed.

“Red light... yellow light... green light... go!” squeaked Professor Flitwick.

“Kano Micro!” yelled Hermione.

“Kooverta Maximus!” yelled Harry. A large and clear shield popped up in front of him, and it absorbed the curse. Harry had expected she would try and use a spell to disable him, so he was ready for it.

“Expelliarmus!” yelled Harry.

“Engorgio!” yelled Hermione, pointing her wand at herself.

Hermione did a quick little trick to avoid the Expelliarmus spell: as soon as the spell hit her, she threw her wand up in the air. Since she wasn't holding a wand, the spell didn't affect her. When she caught the wand again, she was five times her original size: a Hermione version of Hagrid.

"Ballano!" boomed Hermione. A massive, gray ball sprouted out of her wand, and started rolling towards Harry. If he didn't move quickly, it was going to crush him. Harry quickly jumped out of the ball's path, but the ball didn't give up that easily, it started following him.

"Oplo!" yelled Harry, aiming at the ball. But when the yellow sphere hit the ball, it just bounced right off. Harry had to get rid of the ball before he could worry about Hermione... but then he got an idea. What if he got rid of them both at the same time. Harry stopped running, and turned to the ball.

"Wingardium Leviosa!" he yelled. The spell hit the ball, and he directed it right into Hermione. The ball hit her in the face, and knocked her out before she had a chance to react. Harry ran up to her, and plucked her wand out of her massive hand. When he did, she turned back to her normal size.

"Harry Potter wins!" said Professor Flitwick, still flying around the room.

"Ennervate," said Harry, pointing his wand at Hermione. She opened her eyes, and shook herself. Harry helped her up, and gave her back her wand.

"Good game," she said, trying not to sound too disappointed. Harry smiled, and walked back to the perimeter of the circle with her.

"Will... Mr. Tci and... Mr. Aylar Dumbledore please report to the center of the circle please?" piped Professor Flitwick.

"Oh, this should be a good match!" said Ron. "The greatest first year ever against the awesome exchange student!"

The rest of the group must have been thinking the same thing as Ron, because they all started talking excitedly. Tci and Aylar, however, didn't look happy at all about this match up. They both looked worried and scared.

Tci did his same entrance as before, and stood in position with his Swand. Aylar just kept his wand held up high. Then, Harry might've imagined it, but Tci winked at Aylar. It looked very out of place, for a serious dueler to wink at his opponent, but then Aylar nodded.

Before Harry had much time to think about this, Professor Flitwick started the countdown for the match.

“One fish... two fish... red fish... blue fish!”

“Expelliarmus!” both Aylar and Tci yelled at the same time, their spells meeting in midair. But, to Harry’s and everyone else’s surprise, one spell did not overpower the other. In fact, the beam of light connecting the two wands started to turn a deep gold. Aylar and Tci did not seem to care about this, thought. They were both still staring at each other, as if waiting for something.

Just then, something even more unexpected happened: Aylar and Tci started to float off the ground. Higher and higher they hovered, until they were above everyone’s heads. Then, at that moment, Harry thought he saw Aylar nod to Tci, and Tci nodding back. Tci said something, and the beam of light then turned a violent red, and there was another huge explosion. Red light was everywhere, flooding the room. Everyone collapsed to the ground again, to be safe, and no one got up until Professor Flitwick made an announcement.

“I don’t believe it!” he said, sounding as if he didn’t. “It’s a tie!”

Everyone got up, mumbling, and trying to disprove Professor Flitwick, but it was true: both wands lay on the floor, away from their owners. Both Tci and Aylar appeared to be unconscious, and it wasn’t until Professor Flitwick enervated them both that they awoke.

“Well boys,” said Professor Flitwick, “I’m sorry, but it’s a tie. Both of your names will be thrown out.”

Tci and Aylar looked surprised and angered at this news, but it didn’t look like genuine emotion, it looked like they were faking it. But, they both walked back to their spots in the circle.

“Tci!” yelled Harry. “What happened?” he looked over at Harry and shrugged.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I guess our spells just negated each other’s with some sort of horrible explosion.”

Harry nodded, but still wasn’t sure if that was the truth. But, the promise of another match made him forget all about the last one.

“I am pleased to say that there are only three more names in this hat! Mr. Potter, Mr. Malfoy, and Miss. Chang! Congratulations to you all! But, our next match is... Miss Chang against...”

“Not me, not me...” hoped Harry, it was either him or Malfoy.

“Mr. Malfoy!”

Harry breathed a huge sigh of relief, but, then he thought, if Cho won, he would have to face her anyway in the next round. Harry didn't know who to cheer for: Malfoy or Cho.

They both walked to the center of the circle, and bowed. Malfoy looked much more confident battling Cho than Crabbe did.

"Eerht... owt... eno... go!"

"Gluteus Maximus!" yelled Malfoy.

"Maherius!" yelled Cho.

The two spells barely missed each other in midair, and Cho's spell hit Malfoy first, right in the chest... but Malfoy looked unaffected. Malfoy's spell hit Cho, and it looked as though nothing had happened, so Cho shot another Maherius at Malfoy, but he avoided that one, and when he did, he started laughing.

"What's so funny?" asked Cho.

"Your rear!" yelled Malfoy, almost falling over in laughter. Cho looked behind her, and screamed. Her behind had grown twice its normal size in seconds, and did not show any sign of slowing. She dropped her wand, and tried pushing it back in, but it was not working. Her butt was growing exponentially, it was now the size of a beach ball, and Malfoy seemed to be enjoying it as he was rolling on the floor in laughter, but not laughing so much that he couldn't pick up her wand.

"Mr. Malfoy is the winner," announced Professor Flitwick, running over to try and help Cho, who was in tears, and whose behind was now the size of a car. He put some charm on it, and it started shrinking back to its normal size. She calmed down, and, with red eyes, walked back to her spot in the circle

"Since there are only two names left in the hat, there is no need to draw them. The next, and final, match is between Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Potter, for title of Captain of the Dueling Club."

Harry walked to the center, fuming with anger. Malfoy had embarrassed Cho, and he was going to get revenge. He could feel the sweat oozing on his hand as he gripped his wand tighter and tighter.

"Are you sure you don't want to just give up now?" asked Malfoy, mockingly. "Now lets see, what part of your body should I enlarge to embarrass you? How about that giant scar?" He laughed, and Harry could feel his blood boiling.

"Un... deux... trois... roulez!" yelled Professor Flitwick, excited beyond belief over the last match, and from the one coming up.

“Reversio!” yelled Malfoy.

“Inversio!” yelled Harry. The two spells hit their targets, and both Harry and Malfoy were affected. Malfoy’s Reversio spell made Harry see right as left, and left as right, and his Inversio spell made Malfoy see up as down, and down as up.

“You’ll pay for that Potter!” spat Malfoy, trying to align himself, and not looked scared that he might fall to the ceiling at any second. “Corpsi!”

A giant cadaver shot out of Malfoy’s wand, and clung itself to Harry. He tried to resist all urges to scream as the stench of its rotting organs met his nostrils. Harry tried to take it off, but the harder he tugged at it, the more secure it seemed to stay on.

“Aqua Nero!” yelled Harry, looking through the rib cage of the skeleton, and aiming at Malfoy. A cloud appeared above Malfoy’s head, and rain started pouring all over him. Within half a second, he was fully drenched.

“Fters!” yelled Malfoy, pointing his wand at himself. Wings sprouted from his back, and he shot into the air, flying unsteadily since he still saw the ground as the ceiling, and the ceiling as the ground. If Harry was going to beat Malfoy, he had to fly too.

Pretending to tap his back with his wand, Harry transformed his back into wings, and shot up right in front of Malfoy. When he was in the air, the skeleton fell of him, and collapsed into a pile of powder on the floor. Harry was pleased, however, to see that his cloud was still hovering above Malfoy, and he was soaked beyond belief. Just then, Harry looked down to see that more students had entered the Great Hall to watch the final duel, and they were all standing well out of the way of Malfoy and Ron.

“Not bad Potter, not bad! You should’ve joined me when you had the chance, you’ve got talent!”

“No, Malfoy, you should have joined me!” yelled Harry, swooping down, and behind Malfoy. “Tri Oplo!” The three orbs shot out of Harry’s wand, and hit Malfoy in the back, almost knocking him to the ground.

“Quadheri Excallibus!” yelled Malfoy, turning around to see Harry. Two arms exploded out of Malfoy’s right side, and two more arms shot out of his left side. The arms, however, did not look human, they were like five-fingered scythes. Malfoy gave a yell, and flew towards Harry, brandishing his arms. Harry soared out of the way just in time.

“You’re taking this Dueling Club thing a bit far, Malfoy!” yelled Harry. “You could’ve killed me!”

“Don’t you see?” asked Malfoy coolly. “This goes beyond the Hogwarts Dueling Club, this is about me, and all that I stand for!”

“What!?” asked Harry, backing away.

“Fotia Poli!” yelled Malfoy. A beam of flames shot out of his wand, and seared Harry’s leg.

“Arg!” yelled Harry, clutching his leg. There was a small hole where the spell had hit him, and blood was slowly dripping out and onto the floor. When Harry looked down to see where his blood was falling, he noticed that the Great Hall was almost entirely filled with students now, and even a few teachers. Everyone must have wanted to know how this match was going to end by seeing it in person.

Harry looked up, and flew out of the way as Malfoy charged at him again with his knife-hands out front.

“Maherius! Maherius! Maherius!” yelled Harry. Each of the three spells hit Malfoy, but they did not affect him. Malfoy laughed.

“That’s just imaginary pain, Potter! I am in total control of my mind, only real pain can hurt me!”

Harry had to think of some other way to beat Malfoy other than just shooting random spells at him, Malfoy was better than he had anticipated, far better. Harry looked down, and saw some students brandishing the Slytherin banner, cheering for Malfoy. The banner gave Harry an idea.

He flew to the ground, in a clearing of students, and Malfoy followed him down.

“Serpensorta! Serpensorta! Serpensorta! Serpensorta!” yelled Harry, screaming the spell each time. Four snakes stood before him.

“Get him!” hissed Harry, pointing at Malfoy. The snakes nodded, and shot towards Malfoy. He tried to fly away quickly, but one of the snakes jumped up and bit him, dragging him down to the ground. All four of the snakes were now biting Malfoy all over.

“Give up Malfoy!” yelled Harry, feeling very proud of himself.

“NEVER!” screamed Malfoy. He stood up, and burst into flames. The snakes that were on him exploded into four small piles of ash, and the flame surrounding Malfoy got bigger. “I didn’t think it would come to this Potter, but... TORA DEMENTORA!”

A large black orb shot out of Malfoy’s wand, and hit Harry. The entire world around Harry melted away into a massive and dark void.

“Where are you Malfoy!?” yelled Harry. “Come out!” Harry turned around, and was surprised to see that there was someone behind him. He looked up, and saw that it wasn’t Malfoy… but it was his parents.

They were right there, in front of them, smiling down at him, as if they had never been gone.

“Wha- what’s going on?” asked Harry.

“We love you, Harry,” said his mom. Harry’s eyes suddenly filled with tears, he ran up to them and gave them a hug, crying more into them. This wasn’t a trick… this wasn’t a spell… he was with his parents now....

Just then, Harry felt something fall onto his head, like a raindrop. He looked up, and saw what it was: blood. His mom was bleeding from the mouth. Harry backed away, and his mom collapsed to the floor. Harry saw, behind her, a figure that he remembered: Voldemort as a teenager, Tom Riddle.

He was holding a knife in his hand that was dripping with blood, and he was laughing, flinging the blood from the knife everywhere as he laughed. Harry’s dad spoke,

“Why Harry? Why did you kill her?”

“What do you mean, I didn’t kill-”

“It’s all your fault she’s dead! I wish you were never born!” yelled his father. “Go away! GO AWAY!” Harry backed away slowly, not believing what he was seeing. Harry’s dad bent down over his wife, and when he did, Tom Riddle plunged the knife into his head, right through the top. He screamed so loud, Harry thought his ears were going to explode. Blood poured out of his dad’s mouth, ears, eyes, and nose before he collapsed and died. Tom Riddle was now laughing harder than ever.

“No….” whispered Harry. Tom stopped laughing.

“It’s your fault,” he said very monotone, staring right at Harry. “I wouldn’t have had to attack them if you hadn’t been born.”

“No… no it’s not!” yelled Harry, turning around. When he turned around though, he was facing an even more horrible sight. There were hundreds of Tom Riddles, all pointing at him, and chanting,

“It’s all your fault. It’s all your fault.”

“No it’s not,” said Harry, turning around, and finding himself facing a hundred more Tom Riddles. He was surrounded by an infinite number of them.

“It’s all your fault. It’s all your fault,” they chanted in unison.

“No...” said Harry, feeling as though he may collapse. The Tom Riddles were now closing in on him.

“It’s all your fault. It’s all your fault.”

“No it’s not!” yelled Harry, feeling stronger. He had to remind himself, this wasn’t real. This is just a spell.... He thought it was real before, but now he knew the truth! The duel! Malfoy! This was just one of his spells!

“It’s all your fault. It’s all your fault.”

“This is just a spell...”

“It’s all your fault. It’s all your fault.”

“This is just a spell.”

“It’s all your fault. It’s all your fault.”

“This is just a spell!”

“It’s all your fault. It’s all your fault.”

“THIS IS JUST A SPELL! IT’S NOT REAL!” screamed Harry. He suddenly found himself back where he was, fighting Malfoy. He looked terrified, seeing that Harry had somehow gotten out of his spell. People were surrounding them, waiting to see what was going to happen next. Harry jumped to his feet, and brandished his wand.

“IT’S NOT REAL!” he yelled as loud as he could. A giant gold and red beam shot out of Harry’s wand, and hit Malfoy in the forehead. He fell to the ground, unconscious.

All eyes were on Harry, who was breathing fast. The Great Hall was completely silent. Harry walked over to Malfoy, hearing each step echo through the hall. When he arrived at Malfoy, he bent over, picked up his wand, and held it in the air.

The Great Hall burst into applause. Ron and Hermione came running up to him, and carried him back to where the rest of the club was, with cheers coming from the audience the entire time.

“Congratulations Mr. Potter,” said Professor Flitwick. “You are the Dueling Club captain and champion.”

The audience exploded into applause again, and Harry could see some Slytherins dragging Malfoy out of the Great Hall and to the Hospital Wing. Harry felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked behind him, and saw Mrs. Figg.

“Congratulations Harry,” she said, though she was looking grim.

“Thanks professor,” said Harry.

“Harry, I have some good news and some bad news.”

“What is it?” asked Harry.

“Well, the good news is that Lupin and Sirius have found the last phoenix we need to bring your mom back.”

“And what’s the bad news?”

“The bad news... ah, yes... the bad news... well, Harry, I’m afraid your mom’s body has been stolen.”

## **Chapter 20- The Trap**

Harry waited until everyone in the Great Hall had left except for himself, Ron, Hermione, and Mrs. Figg until he said anything.

“What?! How could it be stolen?”

“It has just been reported missing,” said Mrs. Figg. “Me, Sirius, and Remus decided the safest place to keep it was in the Forbidden Forest, with the giants.”

“Why didn’t you just keep it in your office?” asked Ron.

“There are random checks in offices, Weasley,” said Mrs. Figg. “Ever since last year, with Barty Crouch hiding Alastor Moody in his office, security has been tighter. Every drawer, every inch is checked. If I kept her in the office, she would have been discovered and confiscated.”

“So what are we going to do?” asked Harry. “We have to get it back.” Mrs. Figg was looking quite uncomfortable now.

“Well, that’s the problem. You see, under normal circumstances, I would have just gone and looked for it, but I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because I have to be at the Ministry of Magic in just a few hours.” At this remark, Harry, Ron, and Hermione gave a grunt.

“What? There has to be some way around that,” said Harry, folding his arms.

“I’m afraid not. Since I am a ranking wizard, that is, a wizard over the age of forty, I am required to attend. If I don’t go, I could be sent to Azkaban- well, whatever prison they have set up now.”

“Can’t you just clone yourself?” asked Ron.

“No, I’m afraid that’s not an option,” said Mrs. Figg.

“Why not?”

“Security will be tight at the election. If I send a clone, they will find out. They have ways of telling if you’re a clone or not, and they don’t want people sending clones to elections, they don’t want people to take democracy for granted.”

“Also, cloning humans is messy business. Since there’s no clean way to get rid of a clone, besides killing it, I’d have to send it to the Ministry of Cloning, and I’d have to tell them why I had made a clone of myself.”

Hermione nudged Harry in the side.

“I wish someone had told us that before we cloned ourselves,” she whispered.

“I wouldn’t be asking you to do this if I wasn’t completely confident you’d be able to accomplish it,” said Mrs. Figg. “Anyway, it’s probably just some elves or centaurs that took the body anyway. You can just ask for it back and they’ll give it to you.”

“Alright,” said Harry. “We’ll do it.”

“Great,” said Mrs. Figg. “Now, I’ve been told by Hagrid that you know where the giants are, so just go to them. Ask them where they last saw the body, and you can just follow the tracks in the ground that the body made when they took it away.”

“What does the body look like?” asked Ron. “How will we identify it?”

“The body is incased in a light-blue, transparent box. You should be able to see the skeleton inside it.”

Harry shuddered at this last comment. He’d see the skeleton of his mother.

“It’s almost time for bed,” said Mrs. Figg. “Everyone should be in their dormitories now, so it’s the perfect time to set out. Good luck!”

Harry, Ron, and Hermione walked away from her, and out of the Great Hall. When they exited, the candles that were alight inside snuffed out, and they were left in complete darkness.

“Geez,” said Harry. “We might not even need the invisibility cloak it’s so dark.”

“We should bring it, just in case,” said Ron as they got to the portrait of the Fat Lady. She yawned as they arrived at her.

“Ah, I heard about your match today Harry, dear. Congratulations,” she yawned.

“Thanks,” said Harry. “Mungadæ.” The portrait swung open to reveal an empty common room.

“You stay here,” said Harry to Ron and Hermione. “I’ll run up and get the cloak.”

Harry dashed up the stairs, careful not to make a sound. He carefully opened the door to his room, tip-toed over to his drawer, and took out his invisibility cloak.

He put the liquid-like cloak on, and he slipped away from the visible realm. Harry ran back downstairs to the opened portrait, and climbed out.

“All set,” he whispered, causing Ron and Hermione to jump.

“We didn’t see you there,” said Hermione, not looking at Harry.

“I’m right here,” said Harry. They both turned to him. “Get under!”

All three of them had used the invisibility cloak at the same time before, but that was when they were younger. Now they were older, and bigger. It took a while for the three of them to organize themselves so that they all fit under it. As they were walking, it was extremely quiet, and dark. Harry felt he should say something.

“Hey, have you guys heard anything about a dance?” he asked. Ron and Hermione stared at him.

“Besides the one we used in our alibi, no,” said Ron. “Why?”

“Because Cho just asked me out to a dance, and we don’t know if it’s real or not yet,” said Harry. “I thinks he just overheard professor McGonagall talking about our alibi to Professor Dumbledore.

“That’s probably it,” said Hermione. “But, if there is one, at least you have a date.”

“Hey Hermione,” said Ron, sounding a little timid. “About being safe, you know how you told me last year, when I asked you out to the dance not to wait, and use you as a last resort?”

“Yes,” said Hermione quickly.

“Well... if there is a dance... would you... just as a friend that is! Would you like to... well... um...”

“Go to the dance with you?”

“Yes,” said Ron, sounding relieved.

“Of course I would,” giggled Hermione. Maybe it was the fact that Ron’s elbow was in her ear, or that Harry’s knee was right in her face, but Harry saw Hermione blush. Harry also saw Ron give a small smile, and an expression that Harry read as, “Yes!”

“We’re there,” said Harry. They had reached the entrance of the school. Harry took the cloak off of them, and they all gave a huge sigh of relief as they stretched.

“Let’s open this thing,” said Harry, pulling the door. It was much heavier than he expected it to be. “Ron, help me!”

Ron walked over, and started pulling on the same handle as Harry. They both pulled as hard as they could, but the door didn’t budge.

“How strong do you have to be to open this thing?” asked Harry. “Hermione, why don’t you come and help us.” Harry looked over, and saw that Hermione was laughing into her hands.

“What’s so funny?” asked Ron, putting his hands to his side.

“Do you think Hogwarts would be that easy to break into? Just open the door, and walk right in? No way!”

“Well then, how do you propose we get in?” asked Ron.

“Like this,” said Hermione. She walked up to the door, and took out her wand.

“Alohamora Anigora!” she said, tapping the door. It slowly swung open.

“How did you know that?” asked Harry.

“It’s in the prefect guide book, Harry,” said Hermione stiffly. “You should know it, you are a prefect after all.”

Harry gave Ron a sarcastic smile.

“Oh yeah, the prefect guide book, I… read it all the time.” Hermione shook her head, and walked out the door.

“Are we going to do this, or what?” asked Hermione.

“Oh, yeah,” said Ron and Harry, walking out the door. They ran as quickly and swiftly as they could across the grounds, all the way to Hagrid’s hut, which had no lights on, and no smoke coming out of the chimney. It didn’t look its usual inviting self. From there, they stepped into the Forbidden Forest.

“Geez,” said Ron. “For being a ‘Forbidden’ Forest, we certainly go in there an awful lot!”

“Which way to the giants?” whispered Hermione.

“This way,” pointed Harry, remembering the path the unicorn went that they followed. They entered the forest, and it was even darker than Harry remembered it. It felt as though the woods were watching them, and the silence was extremely eerie. There wasn’t any sound being made except for the crunch of leaves under their feet.

After walking a bit, Harry saw a glow.

"That must be the giant's fire," he said. They walked towards it, feeling the warmth of the fire all over them, it was extremely cold outside after all.

As they got closer to the fire, Harry saw the outline of several giants getting clearer. They were all sleeping around the fire, and their horrible breath was almost overwhelming. Harry pulled his cloak over his nose, and Ron and Hermione did the same.

"Wha' are you doin' 'ere!" boomed a voice from behind Harry. He turned around, and saw a giant standing before them with a huge club in her arm. But, this giant had a familiar face. It was Fridwulfa.

"It's me, err- us!" stuttered Harry, still intimidated by the massive club.

Upon realizing who she was talking to, Fridwulfa dropped her club to the ground with a massive boom, and smiled.

"It's 'Arry Potta' and 'is ickle friends!" she belched. "Wha' brings you here this time o' nigh'?"

"Something was stolen," said Harry calmly. "A blue box... we need it back."

"Oh yea'," said Fridwulfa, stroking her chin. "Some teach from th' school came dow' earlier this year an' told us to keep 'n eye on it, an' if anything' happenin' t' it, to come an' tell 'er."

"Yep," squeaked Ron. "That's it."

"Well, earlier some guys come down an' they took it away. I wasn't here at th' time, so I couldn't stop 'em, an' you can't depend on them for anything'." She nodded her head in the direction of the sleeping giants.

"Do you have any idea where they went?" asked Hermione.

"Well, I saw some tracks in th' dirt, the box might've made 'em. I'm too busy t' follow 'em though.... I hope th' box wasn't too 'mportant."

"Well, err- uh...." stuttered Harry, should he tell her that his mom's corpse was in the box?

"Not really," said Ron. "Just a few things of... sentimental value."

"Well then," said Fridwulfa. "You best be on yer way, I got t' keep gardin' our place here, or else th' otha' crittas of th' fores' will take it over."

"Thanks for your help," said Harry as they walked away, toward the sleeping giants. They went around the massive beings, and Harry immediately saw the tracks in the ground of where the box was dragged. He pointed it out to Ron and Hermione, and they all started to follow the tracks in the ground.

"Lumos," they all said at the same time. Three beams of light suddenly appeared on the ground, and they continued following the tracks. Every now and then, they would have to make a slight direction adjustment, the box looked as though it had been dragged by someone who was either insane, or didn't have control over the box.

"Strange," said Harry. "There's no footprints anywhere."

"Maybe they walked in front of it," suggested Ron. "Then the box's tracks would've covered them."

"I don't know, there still should be some sign of them," said Harry quietly.

"Harry!" said Hermione excitedly. "Look over there!" She pointed her beam of light in front of the three of them, and Harry saw what she had seen, it was the blue box. It was glowing a little, giving off some heat, and they could see the glow shining through the trees.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione slowly crept towards the box. They walked in an awkward direction towards it, trying to avoid having an attention drawn to themselves. As they got closer, they saw that the box was in the middle of a small clearing in the forest, and Harry's fear of seeing what was inside the box increased. Just before they were about to enter the clearing, Harry stopped.

"What is it Harry?" asked Hermione.

"I- I don't know if I can see what's inside that box," he said. "I mean, I've been to funerals before, and it's hard enough to look at someone you loved, their body lying in a casket. I... don't know if I can bear seeing her... skeleton." Ron and Hermione looked at each other.

"Well, Harry... if you don't want to come in, we'll understand," said Ron in a very low and quiet voice.

"Yeah, you can stay here, we'll bring it back," said Hermione.

Harry shook his head.

"No, I have to do this," he reminded himself out loud. "I can do this." Ron and Hermione smiled at him, and Hermione put her hand on his shoulder as they walked into the clearing.

“Wow,” said Hermione, shielding her eyes. “That box’s glow is bright!”

“And it’s hot too,” said Ron, wiping his forehead.

“Let’s just get it over with,” said Harry, touching the box, and trying to pick it up. It was extremely heavy. Ron and Hermione came over to help him. They all gripped the box, and heaved with all their might.

“Oh man,” said Ron, wiping more sweat from his head. “This thing is much heavier than it looks. Whoever brought it here must have been strong!” Harry smiled, and started lifting again, but then a thought came to his mind. If the box was so hot, why weren’t they getting burned when they touched it? The heat must be coming from somewhere else....

“Ron! Hermione! We have to get out of here!” yelled Harry. “It must be trap!”

“Why?”

“The box being stolen, the fact that there were no tracks, the extreme heat, and the box being lifted even though it was so heavy. They all add up to one thing.”

“What?” asked Hermione. Harry was about to answer her, when someone came down from the sky and flew right over their heads. The heat was almost unbearable. Whatever swooshed down made a loud squawking noise.

“It was a black phoenix!” yelled Harry, starting to run away. “It must have carried the box here, that’s why there were no tracks, it flew, and since phoenixes can carry large packages, the box must have been no problem for it to pick up. The heat wasn’t coming from the box, it was coming from the bird, watching us... waiting for the right time to attack.”

“That’s exactly right,” came a squeaky voice. Harry looked up, and stopped dead in his tracks. Right before him was Peter Pettigrew, Wormtail. He stood before them with his arms crossed, the silver one on top. “So we meet again. You’re much smarter than even I thought, Harry. No wonder the Dark Lord wants you so badly.”

Harry gritted his teeth, and ran. He didn’t care how Wormtail got there, he just cared about getting away from him. He saw Hermione do the same... where was Ron? Suddenly, Harry felt his body go stiff, his arms fell to his sides, and his legs felt as though they had been glued together. He felt himself being moved backwards, to the spot where he just was.

“No, no, no, no, no,” said Wormtail, with a twisted smile. “You’re not getting away again! I’m taking you directly to the Dark Lord this time, he’ll do what he wishes with you... kill you... or make you join him.”

"I'll never join him," said Harry, surprised he still had control over his mouth. Wormtail shook his head and laughed.

"Harry," he said, "you think being in league with Voldemort is such a bad thing... it's not really. It's just like any other job.... You have a task to do, and you get rewarded for how well you do... and there are always promotions available. It's a very respectable career when you think about."

"A career of killing, and making profit over people suffering!" spat Harry. "What is there to be gained by doing that?"

"Harry," said Wormtail softly, "what is there to be gained by trying to stop it? Voldemort will prevail, whether you want him to or not, whether it is the next day, or the next year. You might as well get on his good side before it's too late...."

"Never..." said Harry softly, even though things were looking hopeless. Wormtail sighed.

"Well... don't you worry. I'm only good with words, Voldemort has other ways of getting people to join him!" He gave a short laugh. "Now then... weren't there three of you?"

Harry moved his eyes over to the side, and saw Hermione was petrified as well, next to him... but Ron was nowhere in sight. Where was he?

"Where is that Weasley friend of yours?" asked Wormtail, shooting a beam of light out of his wand, and looking around.

"I'm right here," came a tiny whisper from Harry's side. He looked over, but no one was there. Wormtail kept on looking, he hadn't heard it.

"Ron," whispered Harry. "Where are you?"

"I'm right next to you," came a voice from next to Harry, but no one was there.

"Are you wearing my invisibility cloak?"

"No... I'm camouflaged." Harry gave a small smile. Ron had used his chameleon's camouflage to hide from Wormtail. Harry was sure happy Ron had chosen a chameleon for his animal.

"I'm going to perform the counter curse on you," whispered Ron. "The second I do, both of us need to stun Wormtail."

"Why both of us?" asked Harry.

“Harry,” said Ron lazily, “he’s a full grown Animagus wizard... he’s extremely powerful. Just one of us doing the stunning spell probably wouldn’t do much, we need twice the power for it to take full effect.”

“Alright,” said Harry. He felt a wand tap him on the back, and Ron mutter something. Harry felt as though he were a snowman that was melting... very quickly. The feeling in his body parts was returning, and the second he could feel his arms, he grabbed his wand from his pocket, and pointed it at Wormtail who was bent over, looking under a rock for Ron.

“Stupefy!” yelled Harry and Ron together. Two blue beams shot out of their wands, and into the dark night. They both hit Wormtail at the same time. He froze where he was, bent over, and then collapsed to the ground with a shocked expression on his face.

Ron ran over to Hermione, and performed the counter curse on her. She spun round, and gave Ron a hug, then a kiss on the cheek.

“You saved us, Ron,” she said, going slightly red.

“Oh....” said Ron, touching his cheek where Hermione had kissed him. “No problem... none at all.”

“Alright you lovebirds,” said Harry, folding his arms, “we still have to get this box back to the giants, and do something with... him, Wormtail.”

“Well, even though he’s gone,” said Hermione, “the box is still going to be heavy, there’s no way we’re going to be able to carry it all the way back to the giants.”

“Almost wish that black phoenix was here... maybe we could enlist his help and get him to carry it back,” said Ron.

“What happened to the phoenix?” wondered Harry.

“It was probably assisting Wormtail with this assignment,” said Ron. “It probably flew away when it saw he got stunned.”

“But why wasn’t it with him when he was trying to recruit me...” asked Harry. Ron and Hermione shrugged.

“Come on,” said Hermione. “We have more pressing matters than that.”

“That box is too heavy for any person to carry,” said Ron.

“And it must have enchantments on it so that no one can use spells on it,” said Hermione.

"Too heavy for a person, eh?" said Harry, stroking his chin. "Well, I know one thing it's not too heavy for!"

"A phoenix?" suggested Ron.

"Well- yes and... okay... I know TWO things it's not too heavy for... a phoenix... and a gryffin!" said Harry excitedly. Hermione and Ron's eyes widened.

"Of course..." said Hermione.

Harry smiled, and clenched his fists, and closed his eyes. Wings popped out of his back, and his arms transformed into gryffin's paws. He soared over to the top of the box, and gripped the sides with his paws. He picked it up into the air, it felt extremely light.

"You guys carry Wormtail," said Harry from above. Hermione and Ron walked over to Peter; Ron gripped his legs, and Hermione gripped his head. They dragged him across the forest, not taking much notice or care if he hit a stump or a bush. It wasn't too long before they reached the place where the giants live. When they arrived, Fridwulfa came running up to them.

"Oh 'Arry! Fank goodness yer 'live!" she grunted loudly. "Th' centaurs came on ov'r afta' youse left an' they said a' summat 'bout a phoenix comin' ter get ya! I wuz 'bout to come over when you is here, an'... oh my goodness! Youse got wings!"

"Shh!" said Harry, setting the box down. "No one except for me, Ron, and Hermione is supposed to know that I can transform like that!" Fridwulfa put her fingers up to her mouth, and imitated zipping her lips.

"Don' worry now 'Arry, I won' tell a soul," she belched.

"Now we need to ask another favor of you," said Ron, throwing his side of Wormtail to the ground.

"Wut is it?"

"We need you to watch this blue box again," said Harry. "Keep a very close eye on it Fridwulfa! It is... something very important."

"Wut is it?" she asked again.

"It's a... it's... something that will defeat Voldemort," said Harry. Fridwulfa put her hands to her ears, and started stomping her feet. Each time one of he legs came crashing down, it was as if there was an explosion. The earth shook beneath that massive force.

"Don' say th' name!" she said.

“Alright, alright!” yelled Ron and Hermione together. “Just stop your stomping!” Fridwulfa stopped banging around.

“So will you guard it?” asked Harry, transforming his back and arms back to their normal form. Fridwulfa nodded and put her hand to her forehead, like a salute.

“I will do my best,” she said.

“No, Fridwulfa,” said Harry. “I need you to make sure no one takes it, not for you to do your best.” Fridwulfa looked at Harry for a moment, and then spoke.

“I will guard it, or I will die trying,” she said. Harry shook his head again.

“No, no, no,” he said. “I need you to guard it, not to die.” Fridwulfa lowered her enormous brow, and glared at Harry, trying to comprehend him.

“No one will get it,” she said, sounding as though she were guessing.

“Exactly,” said Harry. “Now say it loud and proud!” This was a mistake, Fridwulfa took in a massive breath and screamed as loud as she could.

“NO ONE WILL GET IT!”

Even covering his ears didn’t help. Harry could hear her loud and clear, and felt as though his ears were on fire, and his head was going to explode.

“Alrigh’ ‘Arry Potter?”

“Yeah,” said Harry, shaking his head. “Yeah, that’s right.”

“You best be getting’ on yer way back to th’ castle now,” said Fridwulfa. “These giants will be up soon, and they don’t take kindly to strangers.”

Harry, Ron, and Hermione agreed, and set off, back to the castle, dragging Wormtail the entire way.

“I don’t get why we don’t kill him right now,” said Ron when they reached the end of the forest.

“Because there’s no way to get rid of the body,” said Hermione. “It will be discovered soon enough, just like your mom’s Harry, and then we’ll be in trouble.”

“Let’s just keep him with us until tomorrow,” said Harry. “When all the teachers get back from the election, we can turn him in.”

“Where will we keep him, though?” asked Hermione.

“Well, we can’t take him into the dormitories,” said Ron.

“Why don’t we just dig a hole in the ground, and put him in it,” suggested Hermione.  
“Then in the morning, we can just come down, and get him.”

“No,” said Harry. “Even though there’s almost no chance of him escaping... I still don’t want to leave him out of my sight.”

“Well what are we going to do?” asked Ron. Harry looked around, there had to be an answer somewhere. Then he saw it.

“Hagrid’s cabin,” said Harry. “He’s at the Ministry of Magic voting, along with the rest of most of the wizarding world. We can spend the night in there with Wormtail, and no one would no the difference.”

“Sounds good,” said Ron, slinging Wormtail over his shoulder. They all walked towards Hagrid’s cabin, and Hermione opened the door, using a spell. They walked inside, and it was even smaller than Harry had remembered it to be, probably because he had grown. There was only one bed, and a few large chairs.

“Well, it’s better than sleeping on the grass,” yawned Ron, throwing Wormtail on a chair, upside down.

“We’ll have to get up early tomorrow, just before the teachers get back,” said Harry. “I’ll set an alarm.” Harry took out his wand. “Zipnitrius!”

A small jet of gas flew out of Harry’s wand. It materialized a few feet away from him, and took the form of a small, golden alarm clock.

“Do you think it’s safe, going to sleep?” asked Hermione. “I mean... You-Know-Who could be watching us, getting ready for another attack. He could surprise us during the night.”

“I don’t think he will try again tonight, Hermione,” said Harry. “He probably thinks Wormtail is on his way to him with us, and he won’t have time to come up with another plan until after the time Wormtail was supposed to arrive.” Harry looked at Hermione’s face... she didn’t seem to believe him.

“Fine,” said Ron, “if it makes you feel any better, I’ll set an alarm outside the hut.” He got up from the chair he was lying down in, and walked outside. He came back a few seconds later.

“Did you set the alarms?” asked Hermione.

“Sure did,” said Ron. Hermione smiled, and curled up in the bed, looking much happier. Ron whispered to Harry,

“I didn’t set any alarms, I don’t know the spell. Even if I did, it’s not worth it.” Harry smiled, and shook his head. His friend was very weird..... Harry yawned, and sat down in a chair... slowly falling into unconsciousness....

“RRIINNGG!” screamed the alarm clock what felt like seconds later to Harry, but was actually several hours. He sat up from his chair, and tapped the clock with his wand. It disappeared into thin air. He rubbed his eyes, put on his glasses, and the world came into focus. Ron and Hermione were already up. Ron was tending to a fire he made in Hagrid’s fireplace, and Hermione was sitting in front of it.

“What are you doing up?” yawned Harry, standing up and stretching.

“Couldn’t sleep,” they both said together. Harry shrugged, he never lost sleep because of fear.

“Come on,” said Ron. “We have to get out and watch for the teachers, and if they get here fast enough, we may still have time for breakfast. I know I’m starving.” Harry nodded groggily, though agreeing with him, he was rather famished as well. They all stood up slowly, not wanting to leave the warmth of the fire, and stepped outside the hut. It was bitter cold outside, and he had left all his winter clothes in the castle. Hermione must have noticed this, because the next second, Harry felt warmth from a small conjured fire spread all over him. Hermione had a little bottled fire.

They waited outside, looking up at the sky for quite a while, until they saw the first broomstick fly into the castle. Several more followed it, Harry kept a look out for Mrs. Figg. It wasn’t took long before he saw her. She was on a bright red broom, wearing a long black cloak.

Harry indicated her to Ron and Hermione. Hermione shot a small green beam at her that shot right by. Mrs. Figg looked around for where it came from. She spotted the three of them on the ground and flew down.

“So, who won the election?” asked Harry.

“We won’t know for several weeks... months probably. The Ministry likes to take its time with these things... very long times,” said Mrs. Figg.

“Well, do you have any news for us, before we give you ours?” asked Harry.

“Not really, the only news I have is that the last phoenix Remus and Sirius found was lost for a few hours, but just as I was leaving the election a few minutes ago, Sirius, in his dog form of course, came and told me that they had just gotten it back.”

“Great,” said Harry. “I like good news.”

“Well, did you do it?” asked Mrs. Figg, in a quiet voice, looking very cold, even with her many layers on. Harry smiled and nodded. “Excellent work, Harry. I knew you could do it. Did you give her back to the giants?”

“Yes,” said Harry.

“Did you find out who stole it?”

“Yes we did,” said Ron.

“Well... who did it?”

“Peter Pettigrew stole it,” said Harry. “The entire thing was a trap. He lured us into the forest, and then stunned us. Luckily Ron...” Harry didn’t want to give away that Ron was an Animagus, even to Mrs. Figg, “err- camouflaged himself, and he was able to free me, and we stunned Wormtail together.” Mrs. Figg did not look happy at all about this story, even though it had a good ending.

“Oh Harry!” she whined. “I’ll never forgive myself! Are you sure you are okay? I knew I should have sent someone with you... never mind that! I should have gone myself! I can’t believe I put the stupid election before-”

“Mrs. Figg!” yelled Harry, stopping her babbling. “It’s okay, none of us got hurt. Wormtail is not that smart, and we easily beat him.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes,” said Harry, Ron, and Hermione together.

“Well then,” said Mrs. Figg, looking slightly better, “I’m happy you’re all okay. Do you, by any chance, still have Peter?”

“We sure do,” said Harry. “He’s right there, in Hagrid’s hut.”

“Excellent,” said Mrs. Figg. “Once we turn him in, Sirius will be officially free.”

Harry smiled, now he might be able to officially leave the Dursleys, and go and live with Sirius. But, as he thought about that...did he really want to leave, now? Now that Dudley was being nice to him? Oh well, he thought. He’d have plenty of time to think about that later.

They all walked back to Hagrid’s hut, eagerly awaiting warming themselves in the fire they had made, and turning in Wormtail. When they arrived at the entrance to the hut, Harry turned to them.

“Ladies and gentlemen... now presenting... the filthiest, most evil person I personally know... Peter Pettigrew!” he threw open the door, and bowed towards them. Mrs. Figg had a confused look upon her.

“Well, where is he?” she asked.

“What do you mean?” asked Harry, looking inside.

“Where is he?” she asked again. Harry looked inside the hut again, but Wormtail was nowhere to be seen.

## **Chapter 21- The Yule Ball**

“What!?” yelled Harry, Ron, and Hermione together.

“He was just in here!” yelled Harry.

“We just left him for a minute... or two... or more....” said Ron.

“How could he have left? He was unconscious!” squeaked Hermione. The three of them tore the hut apart. They left no book unturned, and no corner uninspected. They looked for several minutes, but the only trace they could find of Wormtail a small pile of ash, right in the middle of the hut. If it wasn’t for Mrs. Figg’s warning of Hagrid returning, they would have all kept searching for the rest of their lives.

“Hurry!” she yelled. “He’s coming!”

“Katheti Repairo!” yelled Harry, Ron, and Hermione as the same time, pointing their wands in various spots. Wherever their wands hit, everything that had originally belonged in that spot, flew there. Within seconds, everything was back to where it should be. Just as they were running out, Hermione shot some water on the fire, putting it out.

They shot out of the hut with Mrs. Figg, going the long way around back to the castle, to avoid Hagrid. They saw him arrive back at his hut, and walk inside, unaware of anything that had occurred while he was away.

“Oh no, Ron!” yelled Hermione. “Did you get rid of your alarms?” Harry saw Ron’s expression, he looked as though he were going to explode with laughter.

“Sure...” he managed to get out. “Yeah, I uh- did it as we were running out...”

“Oh good,” said Hermione as they got up and started walking back to the castle. They arrived back at the Great Hall, to Ron’s delight, right as breakfast was starting. They said good bye to Mrs. Figg, and sat down at the Gryffindor table, stuffing themselves with whatever they could find. When they finally stuffed themselves, the question of Wormtail came up.

“So how could he have left?” asked Ron, wiping his mouth. “I mean... he couldn’t have just gotten up and walked away.”

“And he couldn’t have apparated away either,” said Hermione.

“Well...” said Harry. “Maybe... he was just pretending to be unconscious, waiting for when we were out of his sight, and then make a run for it.”

“No, we would have still seen him come out of the hut,” said Hermione.

“So, the only way he could’ve left, without us seeing him, is if he disappeared inside the hut, and then reappeared somewhere else,” said Harry.

“That describes Apparition perfectly,” said Ron. “He must have Apparated.”

“How many times have I told you!” said Hermione, quite loudly. “You can’t Apparate on school grounds!”

“Maybe he... maybe he killed himself,” suggested Harry. Ron and Hermione looked at him, confused.

“What makes you think that?” they asked together.

“Well... all that we could find of him was that pile of ash... maybe he lit himself on fire.”

“Why would he do that?” asked Ron. “It’s not a very good way of escaping.”

“Better to be killed than to be caught,” said Harry. “That’s probably what he was thinking. If he didn’t kill himself, Voldemort would have killed him for failing his mission... twice, and probably not as nicely as Wormtail would have liked it.”

“Still-” said Ron, about to make another suggestion, when suddenly, Dumbledore’s voice boomed across the entire room.

“Hello students,” he said. Everyone in the Great Hall turned towards him, wondering what he had to say. Dumbledore didn’t usually make announcements at breakfast... it must have been important. Maybe it was about the election... or maybe it was about Wormtail, Harry thought suddenly. Dumbledore did seem to know just about everything that went on in the castle, he might’ve found out about what they had done last night. Maybe he was going to announce that he was taking away two hundred points from Gryffindor for their action. Harry swallowed hard.

“I would like to talk about the election that was held yesterday.”

Harry breathed a sigh of relief.

“I have been asked, and I’m sure many teachers have been asked, who the new Minister of Magic is. I would just like to remind you all that we will not know the results of the election for several months... possibly not until the last few days of school. But, rest assured, I will make an announcement on who the winner is when the time comes.

“Also, it has come to my attention that there is a rumor of a dance spreading around this school. While, at first, I knew of no such thing, I consulted the teachers, and they think it would be a great thing to have one... especially in light of current situations.” He waited a few seconds for people to think about what he had just said. He was talking about

Voldemort's return, Azkaban being taken over, and the resignation of the Minister of Magic. "So, we have decided that on Christmas day, we will have another Yule Ball. Only this time, students of all ages are invited. I ask you all to come, and enjoy yourselves. Now, I'm sure you all have much more important things to do today instead of hearing me blab, so... go ahead!" He sat down, and all the people that were turned toward him suddenly shot in all directions, to do homework, to ask people to the dance or,

"Animagus lessons," said Hermione. "Professor McGonagall told me yesterday, when she came to watch the end of your duel."

Harry groaned. Even though it was fun learning how to transform, he still had many other things he would prefer to have been doing, like talking to Cho. But, he dragged himself to the Transfiguration room, alongside Ron and Hermione.

The lesson took almost the entire day, but it was worth it. By the time Professor McGonagall announced it was finally over, Ron could transform the head, the body, and the tail of a chameleon... but not the legs or the arms yet. He looked very funny, a chameleon with human arms and legs.

Hermione was also doing very well. She was able to become the dimensions of a medium-sized unicorn, and she could transform her legs and back into a horse's. When she was fully transformed like that, she looked like a female centaur, only she had a horn coming out of the top of her head.

Harry was moving along too. He could now transform the body and tail of the gryffin. The only thing he couldn't do yet was the face, the hardest part, since it was extremely detailed, and required much concentration.

Malfoy had still never turned up for a single lesson. By the end of class, Harry's curiosity about him was almost overwhelming. What animal had he chosen? Had he done more than one? He approached Professor McGonagall.

"Professor?" he asked shyly.

"Yes, Potter?" she asked.

"Well, I was just wondering... about Malfoy. What animal, or animals, did he choose?" Professor McGonagall looked up from her work.

"I would like to tell you Potter, and I feel as though I should... but I cannot."

"Why?"

“Because Mr. Malfoy has asked me to keep his lessons private, his transformations private, and what animals he has chosen private. He will show you what he has done in good time.”

“But, why does he want to keep it a secret?” asked Harry.

“I’m sure Mr. Malfoy has his reasons, Mr. Potter,” she said. “Now please, this lesson has taken most of my time for today, and I have to get all this done, and more, before vacation starts.”

“Yes, Professor,” said Harry, leaving, feeling slightly disappointed. He ran out after Ron and Hermione, not knowing any more about Malfoy than he had when he first came into the lesson this morning.

The next week went by fast for Harry, they didn’t do much in their classes, the teachers were busy trying to grade all their assignments. The only class they did much of anything in was, as usual, Care of Magical Creatures where they spent most of their class time trying to get their dragons under control, most of which were now the size of large elephants.

The Dueling Club had also started meeting on a regular basis. Since Harry was the captain, all decisions about the club went through him. After voting for a while, they decided that they would have one more big duel like they had before, only it would include two on two, three on three, and three on one matches. They also decided that, the day after the Quidditch final, they would hold a giant dueling tournament in the Great Hall during dinner for everyone to see.

Since the Christmas holidays were approaching, a list was being set up for students to sign up on, if they wanted to stay at Hogwarts for the vacation. This was the first time Harry had to actually think about whether or not he wanted to go or stay for the holidays, since he and Dudley were friends now. But, when he saw that Ron and Hermione had already signed up to stay, and he remembered the dance with Cho that he had to go to, Harry quickly joined them on the list, along with many other names of people that were staying for the holiday, probably for the dance. As Harry was signing it, he noticed a new flier on the bulletin board.

“Attention all house-elves,” Harry read off the sheet. “During Christmas Day (December 25<sup>th</sup>) you will all be given the day off from work. Any elf seen working will be given clothes. The day after (December 26<sup>th</sup>) any and all house elves are invited to come to Professor Dumbledore, and all those who do will be given payment and vacation days for the rest of their career at Hogwarts.”

“What’s that all about?” asked Ron, then he looked at Hermione. “Do you have anything to do with this?” Hermione turned pink, and smiled.

“Well... yes,” she said.

“I thought you said you were through with spew,” said Ron.

“It’s S.P.E.W., ” said Hermione, “and no, I’m not through with it. I talked to Professor Dumbledore about it. At first, I thought the students and the elves could switch places for a day, and we could all see what being a house elf is like. But, he didn’t think anyone would be willing to participate in it, so we compromised to just give them a day off.”

“But, how will the dance work, without the elves?” asked Harry.

“What do you mean?” asked Hermione.

“Well, last year, the elves made all the food, and helped out,” said Harry. “How will we be able to make the dance a success without them?”

“Oh, that’s right,” said Hermione, “Professor Dumbledore said something about that. He said that the teachers will be doing the cooking, and everything the house elves would normally do.”

“Oh man,” said Ron, sounding disappointed.

“What is it?” asked Hermione. “Did you want to do the work?”

“No way,” said Ron. “It’s just that, the only year Snape is not here is the one year I would get to see him in an apron and a chef’s hat.”

The Christmas holidays finally arrived, and Harry could not be happier.

“Finally,” he thought to himself, as he collapsed on his bed. “An entire two weeks without any classes, Animagus lessons, Quidditch practices, or Dueling Club meetings. All there is to do... is sleep.”

“Harry,” came a voice. “Get up!” Harry sat up from his bed, and looked around.

“Why?” he groaned. He saw that Ron was in the room.

“Cho’s outside the portrait of the fat lady, she wants to see you,” he said. Harry immediately jumped out of bed, and ran down the steps to the common room. He shot towards the main entrance, and opened the portrait door.

“Hello Cho,” said Harry.

“Hey Harry,” she replied.

“What is it?”

“We have to go to Hogsmeade,” she said, smiling.

“Um... why?” asked Harry.

“Because we have to...” she looked like she was about to explode, “buy dance clothes!”

“But, Cho,” said Harry. “I already have some... and I’m sure you have some...”

“Oh, yes... but they don’t match... do they?” she said. “Anyway, we have to go now, before there is a big rush!” She grabbed Harry by the hand, and ran with him down to the Quidditch field. There, they picked up their brooms, and flew to Hogsmeade.

“Well, it’s not as bad as it could be,” thought Harry to himself. However, when they arrived at the store that sold high quality dress robes, Harry realized that what he had thought earlier was totally wrong. He would have preferred to be fighting Wormtail, while playing a Quidditch match, and learning to transform, all at the same time, inside Azkaban, than be doing what he was now.

“This is torture,” thought Harry as Cho tried on another dress. It was her twenty-fifth one that she had tried on in the past two hours. Even though she didn’t care for most of them, she still had Harry carry them all over the store, slowly weighing him down, more and more.

And that wasn’t even the worst part. Cho was very wrong about beating the dance rush, because the entire store was packed with Hogwarts students, all eager to find the best clothes for the dance. Harry’s small bit of salvation arrived when he saw Seamus Finnigan, a fellow Gryffindor fifth-year there, also holding piles of dresses. They talked for what felt like three seconds, when Parvati Patil came over, and dragged Seamus over to try on some more dresses.

After what felt like an eternity, Cho finally found a dress she was happy with. It looked almost exactly like her Hogwarts robe, only it wasn’t as long, and,

“It’s emerald green,” said Harry.

“Is that a problem?” asked Cho.

“Oh, no!” said Harry. “Not at all! That’s the color of my dress robes.”

“Oh, too bad. That means we don’t have to buy you some new ones,” said Cho, actually sounding sad.

“Yeah, too bad,” said Harry, trying not to sound ecstatic. They left the shop, and the hundreds of people inside it, with Harry only carrying one dress now, and they went back to Hogwarts.

When they arrived back, it was extremely late. Harry didn’t realize how long they had spent shopping at the dress store. He said good bye to Cho, and gave her a kiss, then ran

back to the common room, where everyone was leaving for dinner. Harry found Ron and Hermione, and went downstairs with them.

When they arrived in the Great Hall, Harry wasn't too surprised to see that there were not many people there. He was surprised, however, that Hermione was the only girl in the entire room.

"I guess you're the only girl who doesn't care what she's wearing," said Ron. Hermione glared at him.

"I do to care," she said. "Don't you remember what I did last year? Just because I don't obsess over it doesn't mean I don't care."

"Don't worry Hermione," said Ron. "I meant that as a good thing. Now we don't have to waste our time going out and buying stuff like Harry did. That wasn't too much fun for you, was it Harry?"

"Don't remind me about it," said Harry, as he sat down and started eating.

The next few days were very uneventful for Harry, compared with his normal life. Sleeping in until almost noon, coming down for lunch, playing exploding snap or chess with Ron and Hermione, and occasionally talking to Cho. Harry also had to sneak out to Hogsmeade, to buy everyone's presents. But, finally, Christmas Day came. Harry awoke to something being thrown into his face.

"Ow!" he yelled. It was hard, and a corner hit him, so it was very sharp. He rubbed his cheek, and put his glasses on, when he realized what had hit him: a present.

"Merry Christmas!" said Ron, popping up from the end of his bed. "You missed it, McGonagall brought all our presents up, and she almost collapsed afterwards. She wasn't allowed to use her wand because Dumbledore wants them to feel what it's really like being a house elf."

"Oh, too bad," said Harry groggily, unwrapping the present Ron threw at him. It was from Mrs. Weasley. It was the same thing she gave him every year, a green sweater with a big H on the front, along with some assorted cakes and other goodies. Harry saw that Ron had already opened his present from his mom because he was wearing a maroon sweater with a large R on it.

"When will she ever understand that I don't like maroon?" asked Ron, looking disdainfully at his shirt. "Oh yeah, I almost forgot, Hermione wants us to bring our presents downstairs so we can open them all together... but I don't think opening just one will matter much."

Harry jumped out of bed, and grabbed his little pile of presents, Ron did the same. They ran down to the common room which was buzzing with excitement. They quickly spotted

Hermione, who was waving frantically at them from a corner of the room. She also had a small pile of presents with her.

They spent the next hour opening gifts. Harry got mostly candy from people he knew: Ron, Hermione, Mrs. Figg, and Hagrid. Fred and George gave him some of their latest inventions: Soda Song Slurp, a beverage that forced you to talk only by singing, and you could stop only when you had a glass of water; Laughing Licorice, candy that, once you ate it, made you laugh after everything someone said, no matter how serious; and Six Second Salsa, a dip, that once you ate it, put you six seconds into the past or future, making for some very confusing situations.

All in all, it was a very good morning, made even better at breakfast. When they sat down at the table, there was no food in front of them. After a few seconds of being confused, Professor Dumbledore came up to them, dressed in an apron and chefs hat, with a few black marks all over him in various spots. Despite all this, he still had a smile on, and a twinkle in his eye.

“Good morning,” he said happily. “Excellent idea, Hermione, giving the house elves today off... it’s really made everyone realize how much they really help us.” Just then, Professor McGonagall came over, with a large pot of something, and some bowls. She was dressed exactly like Dumbledore, only she had many more burns marks, and she was definitely not wearing a smile. She dunked a giant spoon into the pot, and poured out a white liquid into three bowls which she gave to each of them.

“I hope you like porridge,” she said. “It’s all we have time to make... goodness knows how the house elves can do any more in the time they have.”

Ron dipped his spoon into his bowl, and it exploded, leaving a large burn mark all over his face.

“I don’t think it’s done quite yet, professor,” said Ron, looking paralyzed. Professor McGonagall just sighed, and ran to another group of students who had just come in. When Dumbledore had left too, Harry and Hermione made their breakfast disappear by putting a hiding charm on them. Ron did the same, after recovering from his shock. Since they had a late start this morning, they decided to get ready for the dance, which would be starting in only a few hours. The way back to the common room, however, was littered with house elves, bored out of their minds. They were desperately looking for work, asking all who passed if they needed any help.

“Need a shoe shine, sir?” squeaked one of the elves, sitting down and leaning against the wall, brandishing a cloth.

“How about a little snack, sir?” piped another. “Your shirt washed, perhaps?”

“Need a change of clothes, sir? An entire wardrobe maybe?” said another, grabbing onto Harry’s robes.

“No, that’s okay,” said Harry, brushing him off.

“What’s wrong with you elves?” asked Hermione, stopping, turning around, and looking slightly annoyed.

“We needs work, miss,” said three of them in unison.

“But this is your day off,” said Hermione. “You’re supposed to be out, having fun! Do something you like!”

“But, we likes work miss,” said one of the elves. “And besides, house elves are not supposed to haves fun! We is supposed to work!”

“Are you insane?” yelled Hermione, making the elves back away in fear. “Each and every one of you is entitled to live just as full and happy a life as any wizard is!”

“But miss,” said the same elf, “our lives... is work. We is supposed to work!”

“Can’t you see,” said Harry, now feeling an initiative to speak, “you’re not our slaves, and we don’t want you to feel as though you are! If we treat you like slaves, than we are no better than Voldemort himself!”

“But sir,” said a new elf, “of course you is greater than... he. He is a terrible man! He has done-”

“But was has he done to you that is worse than what we currently do?” yelled Harry. “We force you to work every day of your lives, for no pay, and no breaks! And if you screw up, most of your masters punish you... severely! How is that any better than what he would have you do?”

The elves stayed quiet after this statement. Hermione was beaming at Harry, thankful that he had taken an initiative. Then, it looked as though one of the elves was going to respond to what Harry said, when suddenly, an elf came bouncing down the hallway, and crashed right into Harry.

“Oh! I is so sorry sir!” it said. Harry recovered from the surprise, and looked at the elf. It was wearing giant socks that did not match at all: one was orange with purple dots, and the other was rainbow colored. It was green short shorts on, and a long red and yellow tie. Harry did not even have to look at its round face to see who it was.

“Hello, Dobby,” said Harry, brushing himself off.

“Oh! Mr. Harry Potter! I is so sorry and if-”

“You see,” said Harry, grabbing hold of Dobby’s shoulders, and wheeling him around so that he stood right in front of him. “This is what you all should be like! Express

yourselves like him! Be like him! See how happy he is, with vacations and pay?" The other elves looked at Dobby as if he were a freak, or a disease. Something with which none of them wanted to associate themselves with.

"But, Dobby is... different...." squeaked some of the elves.

"And that's what you all should be," said Harry. "If there's one thing that makes wizards so great is that each and every one of them is different than every other. If we were all the same, no progress would be made, and Voldemort would have taken over long ago! You elves need to be different from each other, not the same, not working every second of every day, you need to... do stuff... and time to do it!"

"So, I tell you all now, tomorrow, when you are given the opportunity to get payment and vacation time, I urge... now, I am telling... ordering you all to take it! Do it, if not for your own good, then for your species' good, and all the wizard's of the world's good!"

Ron and Hermione burst into applause, and Dobby gave a little clap. The rest of the elves looked as though they had seen a horror movie, and immediately ran away from Harry, giving whimpers and screams.

"Well, I don't know if your speech did any good, Harry," said Hermione, "but thanks for showing that you care."

"How did you think of all that stuff to say?" asked Ron.

"I just suddenly thought that we were treating the elves just how Voldemort would, and I don't want anything in common with him," said Harry. But then, he looked at himself. He shared a lot with Voldemort: his scar gave him Voldemort's power of Parseltongue, and his wand had a feather in it from Fawkes, just like Voldemort's, and Harry even looked like Voldemort used to: black hair, and skinny. He and Voldemort were practically related.

"Come on Harry," said Ron and Hermione, "we have to get ready for the dance." They bid Dobby good bye, and set off for their dormitories. It was really only Hermione who needed time to get ready, she wanted to fix her hair, and change into something really nice, which would take a while. All Harry and Ron had to do was slip on their robes, and maybe run a comb through their hair.

In their room, Harry and Ron met Dean and Seamus, their fellow fifth years. They were sitting on their beds, passing the time, while their dates got ready. Harry knew that Seamus was going with Parvati, but he didn't know who Dean was going with. Harry asked him, and he said he was going with Parvati's best friend: Lavender Brown.

Just then, Neville popped into the room. Harry wondered if he had a date for the dance.

"So, Neville... did you ask anyone to the Yule Ball?" asked Harry.

"Are you going with Ginny again?" asked Ron. At the Yule Ball last year, Neville had gone with Ginny. Neville shook his round head.

"Well then, who are you going with?" asked Dean. Neville was turning red, and sweating.

"Well... err- you'll find out..." he stuttered.

"No, tell us!" said Seamus, slipping on his dark red dress robe.

"Well... Eloise Midgen..." said Neville quietly. Ron, Seamus, and Dean each held their mouths shut tight, trying to keep in their laughter... until Ron could hold it no longer. He burst out laughing, and Dean and Seamus soon followed, rolling on the floor laughing. Neville turned as red as Seamus' dress robe.

"It's not funny," said Neville. "I... I was desperate..."

"Better to go with no one than with her!" said Ron.

"She's... so... like a troll!" said Dean, rolling with laughter.

"Her face is so... bubbly and disgusting!" cried Seamus, trying to keep his sides from splitting open. Neville just stood there with his head down.

"Come on Neville," said Ron, putting his hand on Neville's shoulder, "you can do better than her." Neville shrugged his hand off of his shoulder.

"No I can't," he said, "I..."

"You're sad!" yelled Dean.

"And pathetic!" said Seamus.

Harry thought that was too much, and Neville must have thought the same too. He ran out of the room, slamming the door. Harry could hear him wobbling quickly down the stairs.

"Did you see him?" asked Seamus.

"He ran out of the room like a little girl!" said Dean, pulling his light yellow dress robe on. Harry just looked at Ron, and they both knew what they had to do. Ron sighed, and they walked out of their dormitory, and down to the common room, looking for Neville. They found him in a corner, he looked like he was crying. Harry and Ron walked over to him.

"What's wrong Neville?" asked Harry, trying to sound sympathetic.

“You know,” said Neville.

“Is it because we made fun of you for having Eloise for a date?” asked Ron.

“No,” said Neville, “it’s because I don’t have a date for the dance.”

“But, what about Eloise?” asked Harry. Neville shook his head.

“I asked her, but even she said no... I thought that she would gladly say yes... but I couldn’t believe it... she said no....” sobbed Neville.

“Then why did you tell us she was coming with you?” asked Ron.

“I thought telling you I was at least going with someone would sound better than going with no one,” said Neville. “But I suppose I was wrong.”

“I can’t believe Eloise said no...” whispered Ron in Harry’s ear.

“Pathetic, isn’t it?” said Neville. He had heard them. “The worst was rejected by the worst....”

“Neville,” said Harry, “you know what your problem is?”

“What?”

“You have no self esteem. You need some self confidence.” Neville looked up at Harry, and wiped his eyes. He put his hand up to his forehead, looked like he was thinking, and then brought it back down.

“You’re right, Harry,” said Neville quietly. He walked towards the portrait of the fat lady, and left the common room. Ron and Harry were left alone in the common room, almost everyone else had left for the hall outside of the doors to the Great Hall to meet their dates for the dance.

“Where do you suppose he’s going?” asked Harry.

“Probably down to the dance,” said Ron. “Speaking of which, we’ve got to get ready!” They ran back to their room, which was now clear of Dean and Seamus, and pulled their dress robes on. Harry’s was the same as his last year’s, just a little bigger, but Ron’s was completely new: it was a light blue, it looked much better than his frilly maroon one he had last year. After they both cleaned up and combed their hair, though Harry’s looked the same, they headed down to the entrance to the Great Hall.

Harry immediately spotted Cho. She looked extravagant in her light green dress, and her silvery blonde hair was drawn up in a tight bun at the top with two black sticks poking through it.

"Hey Harry!" she called to him. Harry said good bye to Ron, who started wandering off to look for Hermione.

"Cho," said Harry. "You look beautiful." Cho smiled at him.

"You like quite handsome too," she said.

"When are they going to open the doors, and let us in?" asked Harry.

"Malfoy came by a few minutes ago and said they'd let us in soon."

"What?" said Harry. Since when did Malfoy have an authority over the rest of them? "Draco Malfoy came over here and told everyone that?" Cho shook her head.

"No, Lucius Malfoy came and told us, he's one of the chaperons for the dance." Harry's heart sank, and he felt clammy and cold. If Lucius Malfoy was going to be watching the dance, then there'd certainly be more Death Eaters there... probably trying to get to him again... maybe they would succeed this time.

"Wh- why do we need chaperones?" asked Harry.

"To make sure kids don't go crazy, keep things under control," said Cho. "The teachers can't do it, since they have to cook, and the Weird Sisters are coming again, and some of their new songs are much more insane than their last few."

"Oh, you've grown up in the wizarding world," said Harry. "You probably know all about the Weird Sisters, and the Wizarding Wireless."

"What?" said Cho. "I didn't grow up in a wizard family, Harry!"

"You... you didn't?"

"Oh no," said Cho. "I'm a Muggle born. My dad was a doctor, and my mom is a teacher. It was quite a surprise when they found out I was a witch."

"How did they find out?"

"Well, they officially found out when I got the letter from Hogwarts, but I guess they suspected something from my first little magic trick. I was in an operation room with my dad who was working on my grandfather, who was about to die. Suddenly, his heart gave out, and they pronounced him dead. They all left the room, and I touched his hand, and a jolt of lightning shot out of my fingers, right into his chest. That started his heart back up again, and my parents knew I was special."

"Wow, Cho," said Harry, "you saved someone's life when you were little? All I did was make my hair long, and make some glass disappear." They both laughed, and Harry's

forgot all about his worries and troubles for a few precious minutes, until Lucius Malfoy appearing before the mass of students eager to enter. Harry was reminded of the potential danger he was in tonight, and hoped Cho wouldn't get hurt.

Lucius Malfoy threw open the doors to the Great Hall, and everyone shuffled in, in awe of how it looked. There wasn't a single inch in the entire room that wasn't decorated in some way. The walls were glazed with an icy substance to make them look frozen. The ceiling was covered in large icicles that looked like they were made out of crystal rather than ice. There was a Christmas tree in every corner, and each one bent over slightly from hitting the ceiling. The trees had golden ornaments all over them, and lights were strung all over them. The trees almost looked alive, they were spinning a little, allowing everyone to see every part of it. The floor was covered in a fluffy fake snow, that changed to be all the colors of the rainbow in spots all over.

Everyone filed in, and spread out all over. Just when everyone was in, Lucius Malfoy closed the doors, and the dance began. Out of the floor came a square floor, and white foam starting lightly spraying out from it. There were three figures on the pedestal, and the one in the middle snapped its fingers. An enormous lighted ball came down from the ceiling, and started spinning. The room grew brighter, and the three figures came in clearly. Harry recognized them from last year, they were the Weird Sisters. More, smaller light balls popped out from the ceiling, and started spinning as well, radiating all different colors.

The group started singing, and it was a lively tune. Cho grabbed Harry, and stopped right in the middle of the dance floor. She started dancing, by just moving randomly, and Harry immediately started doing the same. The rest of the student body flowed onto the dance floor, dancing the same as Harry and Cho.

The song continued for several minutes, getting faster and more energetic all the time. Finally, it reached its climax, and slowed down, until it finally stopped. The students all clapped, and they were herded to tables that were set up. The tables were the four normal house's places, but they were all as decorated as the room was. They were clear and shiny, with a light, silvery cloth covering most of it.

Harry and Cho sat down at the closest table, and Ron and Hermione joined them. Hermione looked just as extravagant as Cho; she was dressed in almost the exact same dress she wore last year, only this one was covered in shiny glitter and a lighter blue, very white. She also had her hair down differently: it was slick and down, not tied up in a bun. There were no curls like she usually had, and there were blonde highlights spattered through it. She smiled at Harry, her teeth shining.

"Hello Harry," she said.

"Hey Hermione," said Harry.

“Oh, hello Cho,” said Hermione, seeing Cho look over, to see who Harry was talking to. Cho smiled, and put out her arm. Hermione took it, and they shook hands.

“I don’t believe we’ve ever met formally,” said Cho. “I’m Cho Chang.”

“And I’m Hermione Granger,” said Hermione, letting go of their handshake. She presented Ron. “And this is Ron Weasley.”

“Good to meet you, Ron,” said Cho. Ron went very red, and sat back down next to Hermione.

“You have such nice friends,” said Cho.

“I haven’t met any of your,” said Harry. “Where are they?”

“Oh, I don’t expect they’ll be coming to this party,” said Cho. “They’re all seventh years, and are allowed to attend a different dance, the one in Hogsmeade. It’s much larger than this one, and from what I’m told, more fun.”

“More fun than this?” said Harry. “I doubt it!” Just then, Professor Fletcher appeared before Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Cho. He had a big grin on, and looked excited.

“What is it professor?” asked Hermione.

“What would you like?” he asked, barely moving his lips.

“Like for what?” asked Cho.

“What would you like for dinner?” he asked, reaching into a large pocket in his robe. He took out four sheets of parchment, and handed one to each.

“These are the menus,” he said. “Choose what you’d like, point to it with your wand, and it will be served to you as soon as the professors downstairs can fix it up.” With that, he smiled at them once more, and left for the next row of students, giving them menus.

Harry looked over the menu, everything on it seemed delicious. There were things on it from Hogwarts’ breakfast, lunch, and dinner feasts, holiday specials, desert goodies, and many other foods he’d never heard of. Each item had a tiny picture of what it was next to it, and the more Harry looked at the menu, the hungrier he got. He had to choose something before he ate the menu.

“I’ll take... the ham and pineapples,” said Harry, pointing at that choice on the magical menu. When the tip of his wand touched the text, it turned a magnificent white. The menu started to vibrate, and then the words peeled themselves off the paper. The words fluttered about the menu for a few seconds, like a bird just trying out its wings. It flew

higher, just above Harry's head, then it shot off into a small hole in the wall, which probably led to the kitchens.

There were a few seconds of awkward silence, as all eyes were on Harry, wondering if his food was going to come, and wondering where it would come from. Suddenly, the hole that the words shot through expanded, and grew a dark red. Something shot out of the hole, flying faster than any owl Harry had ever seen, and right in front of him. It was a silver platter. Harry nervously took the cover off, and saw what was inside. The smell was the first thing to get to him, and it was delightful. He took a deep breath, savoring the smell, trying to taste the food with his nose. Harry looked down, and before him was the most succulent ham with the shiniest pineapples he'd ever seen.

The Great Hall exploded with the sound of hundreds of people, ordering their meals. White words were flying all over the place in the air, trying to fight their way to the hole in the wall. Some words were knocked out of the sky by bigger ones, forcing the people who ordered them to try something else.

Soon, all of the orders found and worked their ways through the hole. Everyone was staring at the hole in the wall, waiting for the orders to fly at them. Harry, meanwhile, was busy enjoying his meal, not noticing the silence, broken only by his chewing, and silverware clunking.

The hole in the wall, already bigger from Harry's order, now grew fifty times its size, taking up almost the entire wall. A fiery glow appeared inside it, and then the room started to shake a little. Objects started flying out of the hole, zipping around the room for a second, then stopping in front of a student. The food shot out like Frisbees, flying all over, soaring through the air. Even though the air above the tables was chaotic, not a single drop of soup was spilled, not a single platter was shattered. Each arrived at the correct student, prompt and in perfect order.

Within a few seconds, every student had his or her dinner. The room was now filled with exclamations over how good it was, and asking for others to pass certain condiments.

"Well, so far so good," said Harry, his mouth full to Ron and Hermione. They looked at him, Ron with spaghetti still in his mouth, and Hermione with a spoonful of soup up to her mouth.

"What do you mean?" asked Ron, quickly slurping up the noodles that were hanging out of his mouth.

"I mean," said Harry, coming in closer to them so that Cho wouldn't overhear, "that the chaperoning Death Eaters haven't tried anything yet." Harry looked around, and saw that in addition to Lucius Malfoy, there were several others that were in Voldemort's circle. Harry didn't recognize only a handful of them. He hoped they would be enough to stop an attack.

“What makes you think they would try something?” asked Hermione. Harry gave her a look.

“Hermione,” he said, sighing, “every place I go, Voldemort is trying to recruit me, I don’t think this will be any exception.”

“I hope you’re wrong,” said Ron, spinning some more spaghetti on his fork.

“But,” said Hermione, “what I meant was, I don’t think they’d try anything with Dumbledore here. I mean, even if he is in the kitchens, he’s still here, and they wouldn’t be able to get away with anything.”

“I hope you’re right,” said Ron, eating what he put on his fork. Harry shook his head, his best friend was a little weird.

After almost an hour of eating dinner, everyone was finished, and full beyond belief. Once someone was done, their plate magically flew back through the hole, and to the kitchen where it would be cleaned. So, with everyone done, the room was spotless.

The Weird Sisters came back to their podium, and started singing again, a signal for people to start dancing. Most were too stuffed to even think about dancing, but for others, their dates overpowered them. Seamus and Dean were dragged out by Parvati and Lavender, Fred and George were beckoned by Alicia and Angelina, and Harry and Ron were forced back by Cho and Hermione. They walked back out to the dance floor, and boogied with their partners.

“This is my date dad,” came a voice from over the heads of several students. Harry recognized it as Draco Malfoy’s. He wanted to know who Malfoy had brought, and who was stupid enough to come with him, so he said he wanted to go get something to drink to Cho, and walked over. When he saw who was Malfoy’s date, Harry almost fainted. He felt his heart skip a beat, and almost choked on the air in his mouth.

“This is my date... Ginny Weasley,” said Malfoy. Sure enough, it was true. She was standing there, right next to him, looking happier than Harry had ever seen her; a real happiness, not one put on for show. Malfoy’s arm was around her shoulder, and he was smiling, awaiting his father’s reaction. It was a sickening sight.

“Hello Miss. Weasley,” said Mr. Malfoy nodding his head in her direction. He had a smirk on his face, that was slowly transforming into a grimace. He looked at her like she was something to be flushed down the toilet. Ginny said something to the Malfoys, and walked away, still smiling.

“What are you thinking, son?” said Mr. Malfoy, leaning into his son’s ear.

“What do you mean?” said Draco.

“What do you think I mean!” spat Mr. Malfoy. “I’d rather have you be with a Mudblood than with... a Weasley! Aren’t there any wizarding family’s girls in your class? Someone more... like us.”

“But...” said Draco, “I... I love Ginny, father,” said Draco. This was too much for Mr. Malfoy. He slapped his son across the face, and pointed a finger at him. Draco stood perfectly still, as though he were used to this treatment.

“Now you listen to me, son,” said Mr. Malfoy. “After all Lord Voldemort has done for us... for you... this is NOT a good way to pay him back! Dating a Weasley, my god! What is wrong with you!? I expect that you will not warn her... will you? And by the time the rooster crows tomorrow, I want her crying because you broke up with her! Is that understood?”

“Yes... father,” said Draco, his head down. His father put his hand on his shoulder.

“It’s for your own good,” he said as he walked off to another corner of the room.

What was going on? What could Malfoy warn Ginny about? How did Voldemort help Malfoy and his family? Just as all these thoughts were going through Harry’s head, he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned around, and saw Ginny. She was looking even better than Harry remembered. She had a yellow dress on that shone like the sun. She had her hair down differently, it came down far past her shoulders, looking very slick and shiny as well. In fact, the only thing bad about her was her expression. She looked as though she was going to yell at Harry.

“Oh, hello Ginny,” stuttered Harry.

“What are you doing?” she asked, putting her hands to her sides.

“I- I- I- I... nothing,” stammered Harry.

“Why were you watching us?” said Ginny.

“You... you saw me?” asked Harry. Ginny rolled her eyes.

“Me and half of the students here! With that dazed expression on your face and you staring straight at us, how could I have not noticed?”

“I... I’m sorry Ginny,” said Harry. “I just saw you... and Malfoy... and just wondered what was going on.” Ginny sighed.

“I know, it’s kind of strange right now, but... I really like him,” she said. And with that, she walked back to the Malfoys.

By now, the song had ended, and Harry quickly ran to get some drinks, so Cho would not ask him about what he was really doing. He ran back to the table, trying not to spill the two glasses, and sat down next to Cho, Ron, and Hermione. Cho gladly took one, and started drinking it. Harry had to tell Ron what Ginny was doing.

“Um... Ron...” said Harry.

“Yeah, Harry?” asked Ron.

“Do you... well... do you know who Ginny’s date is?”

“No, why?” he said. How could he say it nicely? Then, there was nothing nice about Malfoy, so Harry just said it blatantly.

“She’s here with... Malfoy.” Ron’s eyes grew twice their size and he turned red. He sat up, looking like a robot, and started walking in the direction of where Ginny was. Harry ran up to him, to stop him before he killed someone.

“Ron!” yelled Harry, pressing against him so that he couldn’t move. “Ron! I think it’s okay!” He couldn’t bring himself to say that Malfoy was planning to dump her later tonight.

“It doesn’t matter,” said Ron, continuing to move.

“Ron!” yelled Harry. “You don’t want to embarrass her? Do you?” Ron stopped in his tracks, and turned backwards, facing Harry.

“No, I want to protect her,” said Ron.

“You killing Malfoy will not protect her,” said Harry. “It will only make her hate you, and feel embarrassed.” Ron stopped where he was.

“You’re right,” he said.

“Don’t worry,” said Harry, leading him back to their table, “if anything happens to her, I’ll help you kill Malfoy.”

“I don’t want to wait until he does something,” said Ron. Harry gritted his teeth. He had to try and change the subject for a while.

“So... have you seen Neville around here anywhere?” asked Harry.

“No,” said Ron, “Come to think of it... I haven’t seen him since he left the common room. I wonder where he is.”

Any thought of Neville, however, quickly faded away as the band started a new song. Cho and Hermione came running out to Harry and Ron, and they danced again.

Hour passed quickly, and the Yule Ball was coming to an end. A few students had already left, it was getting late. Among them were Malfoy and his cronies, Harry and Ron were happy to be rid of them. After the latest song had ended, the group of four sat down at their table, sweating from vigorously dancing for the past few hours.

“So what do you think?” asked Harry to the group at the table. “Should we call it a night, or what?”

“I think you’re right,” said Hermione, yawning and stretching.

“I would have to concur as well,” said Ron.

“Oh sure, you sound elegant NOW,” said Hermione. “Ron, you really need to take some dancing lessons.” Just as they were laughing over how Ron had tripped and fallen on Hermione during a song, a giant explosion rang out in the hall. Blowing everything into the air.

## **Chapter 22- The Aftermath**

Harry instinctively covered his ears from the sound of it; it was incredibly loud, it sounded as though the explosion was coming from right next to him. He looked around him. People, chairs, table, decorations, everything was flying through the air, crashing into walls and the ceiling.

As the sound of the explosion died down, Harry let go of his ears, and looked up, and saw that the explosion had occurred right next to him. Right in the middle of the dance floor, there was a massive abyss. Several students were inside it, groaning. Harry ran over, covering his mouth from the smoke, about to help, when several more, smaller explosions rang out, all over the Great Hall. Harry didn't have time to look where each of them were exactly coming from, but he heard several coming from the walls, from the ceiling, and more from the floor. Harry collapsed onto the floor from the force of the explosions.

The air was now filled with sounds of screaming and coughing. Harry looked up, but his glasses fell off. Suddenly, he felt the presence of someone before him. Harry looked up slowly, expecting to see Voldemort himself standing right in front of him, ready to recruit him into his army of darkness. But instead, he saw Dumbledore. Even with his glasses off, Harry could tell who it was. There was no twinkle in his eye, however, he had a stern look to him.

He pointed his wand at Harry, and said something. Harry felt renewed strength flow through his body, and his glasses come back onto his face.

"What happened, professor?" asked Harry, getting himself up.

"I don't know, Harry," said Dumbledore. He started walking over to the other students, waking them up, just like he did to Harry.

"There's more over here, Dumbledore!" came a voice from far in a corner. Harry looked over to see who it was, and saw that it was Mr. Malfoy, trying to look as though he had nothing to do with this incident. Harry knew this was all his fault, this was the thing he didn't want his son to warn Ginny about. Harry clenched his fists, filled with rage. But, he had more pressing matters than revenge: he had to find his friends.

Harry ran back to the table, which was covered in ash and smoke. He looked all over for any sign of Cho, Ron, or Hermione, but couldn't find anything. He then had an idea to look under the table, and saw each of them under there, huddled together.

"Are you okay!?" yelled Harry, crawling towards them.

"Yeah," coughed each of them.

"What happened?" asked Ron. He had ash all over his face.

“We don’t know,” said Harry.

“We?” said Hermione. She had black marks all over her face, smearing her makeup everywhere; she looked like a disaster.

“I talked to Dumbledore,” said Harry quickly. “But I know what happened. This is just another one of Voldemort’s plans to get me! We’ve got to get out of this room, and fast, before he gets here!”

He got them all up, and propped Cho on his shoulder, who looked extremely pale, and felt weak. They walked their way passed the bodies on the floor, and the overturned tables, and the food that lay rotten on the floor.

They got to the door, and Harry kicked it open. To his surprise, Draco Malfoy stood before them, with a shocked expression on his face.

“What?” yelled Harry. “Are you amazed that I’m not dead or with Voldemort yet?!” He walked passed Malfoy, but he grabbed him.

“Shut up, Potter. Just shut up,” he said. “Where’s Ginny? Did she leave like I told her to?”

“Oh, I’m sure she’s just... what? You... you still told her to leave, even after what your dad said?” stuttered Harry, amazed that Malfoy would betray his father.

“Of course I did!” spat Malfoy as he burst into the Great Hall. “I never betray friends, and I certainly never betray the ones I love!”

Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Cho stood there, perplexed and amazed. They had never seen even a shred of good in Malfoy, and now they were seeing a whole new side of him that none of them had ever gotten so much of a glimpse of.

“What’s going on?” came a voice from behind them. “I heard a noise.” Harry turned around to see who it was, and was relieved to see that it was Ginny. Ron ran up to her.

“Oh Ginny!” he yelled. “You’re safe!” Fred and George suddenly came running out of the Great Hall, coughing.

“We heard some maniac yelling for Ginny,” said Fred, “and we were wondering where she is.”

“Do any of you know where...” started George, just seeing that Ginny was okay. They walked up to her.

“Are you okay?” they both said to her. She didn’t look okay, she looked quite annoyed and angry.

“Of course I am!” she blurted out, pushing them away. “I’m not a little kid anymore, I can take care of myself!” Just then, Malfoy appeared in the doorway, along with many other students who were getting out of their shock from the explosion.

“Ginny!” he yelled when he saw her. He ran up to her, and put his arms around her. “Thank god you’re alright.” Fred and George looked horrified, seeing Malfoy embrace Ginny like that. They tore him off of her.

“What do you think you’re doing!?” yelled George. Malfoy was looking scared, he may be a good fighter, but he couldn’t take on two at once.

“I... I... well...”

“It’s okay,” said Ginny, forcing her way between the twins. She held Malfoy’s hand, and they started waling down the hall together, talking back and forth to each other. As they were walking down, Fred and George’s jaws seemed to fall further to the floor, in disbelief of what had just happened.

“How can... Ginny? She... likes... him!” stuttered Fred.

“I think it’s nice,” said Cho, finally recovering from her shock. “Maybe that’s just what Malfoy needs to warm up his heart.” Harry smiled at her, he could count on Cho to always look on the bright side of things.

“Attention, all students report to the Great Hall,” boomed a voice in the hallway. This was the first time Harry had ever heard an announcement in school, but he was certainly going to follow it. They all walked back into the Great Hall, knowing what the announcement was going to be about.

The Great Hall retained no more of its former glory. All the icicles on the ceiling had fallen to the floor and shattered, the Christmas trees had all fallen over, and their ornaments were everywhere, in pieces. The fluffy multicolored snow that had adorned the floor was now a dark black all over. The tables that had looked so magnificent were now overturned and broken all over. The Weird Sister’s podium was destroyed, as were their instruments. The Weird Sisters themselves seemed to be okay, Harry saw them tending to themselves with their wands, shooting gauze over their wounds.

Over where the dance floor used to be, there was now a huddled mass of students, gathered around Madam Pomfrey. She was trying to heal them all as well as she could, as fast as she could, and it seemed to be working well, except she looked as though she may explode, the way her hair was all frizzled, and her face all red.

Now all the professors were in the Great Hall, each of them was still dressed in their cooking clothes, except for Dumbledore, who had taken them off. They were all trying to heal some students that were still on the floor, or in one of the many holes that lay blasted on every surface in the room.

“Attention,” yelled Dumbledore, his voice magically magnified, “we have just figured out the cause of this tragedy.”

“Harry was ready, he could feel the excitement of revenge flowing through him. Dumbledore knew that some of the chaperones were Death Eaters, and that this was an attempt to try and terrorize and involuntarily recruit new servants for Voldemort.

“The cause of this was... magical text.”

“What!?” yelled Harry, Ron, and Hermione together, quite loudly. Some of the healed students looked at them, wondering what they meant.

“As you may have noticed, some of the magical orders didn’t make it to us. The ones that didn’t fall to the floor, and appeared to disappear. They did not disappear, however. Since all of your menus are immensely complex, and we had to make hundreds of them in a short time, quickly and efficiently, we were forced to use an experimental copying spell that uses highly unstable elements, and has not been tested extensively. When the words fell to the floor, they absorbed the elements in the wood, making it explosive. The friction from the hours of having people dance all over the floor gave the giant bomb enough heat to finally go off.”

Most students stood there, looking at Dumbledore with glazed eyes. Not many of them had gone to Muggle schools, so they never took science courses. All they understood was magic. They didn’t know what friction and unstable meant. Harry, however, had been to Muggle school (and did quite well), and understood. But, he knew there had to be more to it....

“I apologize to all of you that were hurt... that would be all of you.... But, the most serious injuries were only a mild cause of a bruise, and a few faints. I’m sorry to say that you are all still expected to go on with your lives, and report to your common rooms. Since it is now past midnight, Christmas is officially over, and the house elves should be eager to clean this up. The Great Hall will be ready for your use tomorrow.”

As if by magic, at least sixty house elves popped into the Great Hall, and started cleaning up. Even after just few minutes, the Great Hall was looking much better. Seeing that everyone was alright, people then started heading back to their common rooms. Harry, however, wanted to talk to Dumbledore.

“Excuse me, Headmaster,” said Harry.

“Yes Harry? What is it?” said the old man.

“Well, I was just wondering... do you think there could be... more to what happened here tonight, like, Voldemort influenced?”

"I don't doubt it for a second, Harry," said Dumbledore, waling off, "but, innocent until proven guilty, so I can't say anything yet."

Harry took a minute to understand, and then walked back to his group. They all walked out of the Great Hall, Harry kissed Cho goodbye, and they went their separate paths to their common rooms. It took a while to get back to the Gryffindor common room for Harry, Ron, and Hermione, they had to fight their way through crowds of people all over, still confused, and talking about what had happened. When they got back to the portrait of the Fat Lady, however, they came before a disturbing sight: Malfoy kissing Ginny. As soon as they saw the three of them, they broke apart, and brushed themselves off, trying to pretend nothing had happened.

"Ahem, um... thanks for the great night, Ginny... I'll... uh, see you later!" said Malfoy, walking off.

"See you Draco," said Ginny, giggling.

"Ginny!" said Ron. "You showed him where our common room is!"

"Well, we know where theirs is," whispered Harry to Ron. In their second year, they had discovered where the Slytherin Common room was.

"Well, it's not like I told him the password," said Ginny sternly. A question had been burning in Harry's mind for a while, so he decided it was time to ask.

"Ginny," he asked, "how did you and Draco meet?" Ginny blushed.

"It was quite a while ago, actually," she said, sounding as if she were floating. "He was talking to Professor Fletcher about getting some pieces of an animal... I don't remember exactly. Anyway, I came down to do some extra credit for potions, and he was walking up the stairs I was going down. We both weren't looking, and we crashed into each other. He said, 'Watch where you going you... you... beautiful person....' And he looked into my eyes, I looked into his, and... it just... happened I guess."

Everyone smiled at this story, even Harry had to admit it was pretty nice. Then Neville suddenly came running up the stairs to the Gryffindor common room. He was looking oddly confident, though slightly shaken at the same time.

"Hey Neville!" said Harry. "Where have you been?" Neville stopped, and looked at Harry. His facial expression was different too: he looked like he was smiling, and his eyes were bigger. He looked... happy. He was also wearing different clothes... a long black shirt....

"Oh, I... went to the Hogsmeade Party," said Neville in a monotone voice. Everyone's jaw dropped.

“You went there!” yelled everybody. Neville grinned.

“Yeah,” he said. He patted Harry and Ron on their shoulders. “Got just what I needed... thanks you guys, I’ll never be the same again... Gootays.” The door swung open, and Neville popped inside, everyone else stayed outside, dumbstruck.

“I can’t believe... Neville? Went... wow....” stuttered Ron.

Harry felt happy for Neville... but he just couldn’t stop feeling that there was something he was hiding from them.

## **Chapter 23- Second Round**

After Christmas vacation, it was back to regular work for Harry and the rest of the school. The O.W.L.s looked much closer this side of the holidays, and Harry and Ron started studying almost as obsessively as Hermione. Though they weren't left with much free time after classes, Animagus lessons, Quidditch practice, and the Dueling Club, they still manage to squeeze in a few minutes each day to study at the library, absorbing any book they could find, trying to learn everything they could.

"I still can't believe that almost all of the house elves decided to take pay and vacation days!" exclaimed Hermione (during one of those such study sessions) for the fifth time that day. After the immense success of her idea, she just kept going on and on about it, never stopping.

"Okay, Hermione," said Harry. "We know you're happy for the house elves, but please, stop telling us every five minutes."

"You know what," said Ron, "we go through all of this time studying, and we don't even know what the O.W.L.s are going to be like! I mean, are they going to be written, hands-on, or what? Fred, George, Percy, Charlie, and Bill have all told me the same thing: 'It changes every year, so even if we told you, it wouldn't help.'"

"Oh Ron," said Hermione, briefly looking up from a book, "you could have asked me anytime! I already asked all the teachers what it's going to be like this year months ago, back at the beginning of the year."

"Well..." said Harry and Ron.

"They told me that every class will have two O.W.L.s available: an Average O.W.L., and an Advanced O.W.L. This means we each can get a possible total of sixteen O.W.L.s. To get the Average O.W.L., you have to pass a written exam, and to get an Advanced O.W.L., you have to pass a hands-on exam, a challenge."

"Do you know what the Advance O.W.L challenges are?" asked Harry. Hermione shook her head.

"No, and we won't know until the day of the tests."

"Why can't they tell us what the challenges are?" asked Ron. "I mean, we know what the tests will be on, why can't we know what the Advanced ones will be on?" Hermione was about to answer, when Harry spoke,

"Because if they told us what the Advanced tests were, it would defeat the entire purpose of having it be Advanced. It tests our ability to face fear, danger, and adapt to the current situation." Hermione nodded.

"That's exactly right," she said. "It's what all the teachers told me." Ron groaned.

"It seems the more I think and find out about the O.W.L.s, the more I'm not looking forward to them."

The days continued along like that, quite uneventful. Harry was becoming more and more fearful of Voldemort. Why was he waiting so long to come for Harry himself? Why didn't he just launch an all out attack on the school? The lack of dark activity was almost unnerving. Harry also began to dread his classes which became horribly boring; all they did was review their first, second, third, and fourth year work. They didn't learn anything new. Even Hagrid chained up the dragons so that they could spend the next few weeks reviewing.

Harry welcomed Quidditch practice with open arms. It was great to fly away from the boringness of the classes. He was also especially looking forward to the next Dueling Club meet, and when the day came for it, he was very excited.

It was late at night, and Animagus lessons had just ended. By now, all of them could transform their entire bodies to their animal forms. They were now working on staying like their animal for long periods of time. While it wasn't hard to transform just one part of your body, and keep it that way for a long time, staying the entire animal for extended periods of time was very tiring, and even painful.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione each walked down to the Great Hall, excited about their Dueling matches. Tonight they would be doing groups against other groups, it should be interesting. They entered the massive room, and it looked just like it did before: the tables were pushed against the wall, and there was a giant open space in the middle. Most of the students were already there, in fact Harry, Ron, and Hermione were the last to arrive. Cho waved to Harry as he entered the ring of duelers. Professor Flitwick was there again, only this time he was not flying in the air, he was on a giant chair at the front of the room. He had two big, black cubes on either side of him.

"Well, it looks as though we're all here," said Professor Flitwick, sitting down (he was taller sitting down than he was standing), "so let's get started! I have here, on my left, a box. When I tap it with my wand, either a 1-2, 1-3, 2-2, 2-3, or 3-3 will appear. This will tell us which kind of duel we will have. On my right, I have another box. When I tap it with my wand, the student's names that will participate in this duel will appear, clustered in groups showing you which team you will be on. The winners of the round will continue to play, but the losers will have their names taken out of the memory of the box. This is the easiest and fastest way to randomly choose dueling groups, and it should be a lot of fun. I wish luck to you all... especially those of you who will have to face three others at once."

Everyone exchanged nervous and excited glances. Everyone was ready to escape from their dull school life with a good duel.

“Our first duel is...” Professor Flitwick tapped the left box with his wand. A giant, red, 2-2 appeared, “a two against two match with...” he tapped the right box, and four names appeared on the front of the box. Two were together, and two others were on the other side. “Mr. Gregory Goyle and Mr. Vincent Crabbe against Miss. Ginny Weasley and Mr. Tci!”

There was a very loud silence as the four competitors gathered in the center of the circle, and the rest of the students backed away. Ginny and Tci came together on one side, Crabbe and Goyle on the other. Ginny and Tci said something to each other, a plan probably, and Crabbe and Goyle just smirked. They held their wands out, in dueling position. Ginny did the same, but Tci insisted on repeating his normal dueling stance. He grabbed his Swand out of his sheath, and took his jacket off.

“Get ready,” said Professor Flitwick, looking excited, “three... two...one... go!”

“Expelliarmus!” said Ginny and Tci together.

“Kooverta Maximus!” yelled Crabbe.

“Bakatcha!” yelled Goyle.

Crabbe’s spell came into effect first. A giant, light-blue beam came out of his wand, and materialized in front of himself and Goyle. It became a giant transparent window, barely visible. The disarming spells hit it, but stopped there, absorbed by the shield. Goyle’s spell hit the front of the shield, making it glow a brilliant yellow. When the glow died down a bit, the shield had turned into a mirror. Now the shield wouldn’t just absorb attacks, it would reflect them back. Tci and Ginny were in trouble.

They, however, didn’t seem to care that there was a giant mirror blocking their spells, or that Crabbe and Goyle gave each other a high five, and laughed. Tci just stepped back, and Ginny walked forward. Ginny then started moving her wand in a very hard motion, aiming right in front of Tci, as if there was something on her wand that she was trying to shake off.

“Emfi Balaki! Emfi Balaki! Emfi Balaki!” she yelled each time she pointed her wand. Each time she did that, a ball the size of baseball popped out, and landed in front of Tci. They looked very hard, heavy, and metallic. Once there were about twenty balls, Tci pointed his Swand at them.

“Apoyiosi!” he yelled, beating his Swand in a similar manner to Ginny. He shot a green beam out of his Swand, hitting a ball. The spell made it fly high in the air, over the shield, and right to where Crabbe and Goyle were. Crabbe and Goyle dropped their wands, and covered their heads. Tci was sending more and more balls over, and Ginny kept making more. They continued flying over the mirror, bombarding Crabbe and Goyle. They were now on the ground, almost crying from the pain the balls were causing them.

Now there were at least one hundred balls in a neat pile for Tci to launch over to Crabbe and Goyle, so Ginny made her move. She ran around the mirror shield, and over to Crabbe and Goyle's forgotten wands. She quickly picked them up, trying to avoid the balls, and Crabbe and Goyle didn't even notice. As soon as she held the wands up in the air, Tci stopped launching balls over, and made the rest of the pile disappear.

"Mr. Tci and Miss. Ginny Weasley are the winners!" squeaked Professor Flitwick.  
"Excellent teamwork! I don't think I've ever seen better!"

Crabbe and Goyle's red names disappeared from the left box. They walked back to their spot in the circle next to Malfoy. Ginny and Tci smiled at each other, and Tci put his jacked back on. Ginny walked back to her spot, right next to Malfoy. Malfoy pushed Goyle out of the way to make room for her.

"Alright everyone, lets get ready for our next match," said Professor Flitwick. He tapped the right cube with his wand again, and a red flash appeared on it. When it receded, a red, 3-1 appeared.

"Ah, our first three on one duel!" squealed Professor Flitwick. "This should be fun!" Harry looked around, no one else seemed to think it would be much fun if they got picked as the one to go against three. Everyone was very still and quiet, fidgeting their wands anxiously. Professor Flitwick tapped the left box, three names appeared on the left.

"The team of three is... Mr. Fred Weasley, Mr. Ron Weasley, and Miss. Hermione Granger!" said Professor Flitwick. The three of them breathed a sigh of relief, happy that they weren't the one against the three.

"And the one is... Mr. George Weasley!" squeaked Professor Flitwick. All eyes and heads turned to George, and he turned as white as Moaning Myrtle. It took a push from Seamus and Dean to get him into the ring. He nervously walked over to the other side, swallowed hard, and put out his wand.

"Teams ready... set... go!" said Professor Flitwick.

"Nero Poli!" said Hermione. A small, blue, liquidy ball shot out of her wand.

"Fotia Poli!" said Ron. A larger, red, fiery ball came out of his wand.

"Electa Poli!" said Fred. A yellow, baseball-sized, sharp ball shot out.

The three balls seemed to grow larger in the air, and by the time they were about to hit George, they were the size of basketballs. George had no time to react, he just ducked down, and covered his head. The three balls hit him. The electric one hit his feet, binding them to the floor, the fiery one hit his head, sending his hair into a blaze, and the water one hit him right in the stomach, knocking the wind out of him, and causing him to fall

over backwards, dropping his wand. His hair was still on fire when Fred came up, spun around, and plucked the wand out of his brother's hand, waving it on the air.

"Well, it appears as though the winner has been declared!" said Professor Flitwick as George was twitching on the floor, and Hermione was putting out the fire in his hair. "I must say! That has to have been one of the fastest duels I've ever seen!" Ron dragged George back to his place in the circle, and Professor Flitwick made George's name disappear from the box.

"Good job you two," said Harry to Hermione and Ron when they returned to their spots. "Great teamwork. None of those spells would've worked as well on its own than all three did together."

"That was what we were thinking," said Hermione, grinning.

"Alright everyone," said Professor Flitwick, "it's time for the next duel!" He tapped the boxes again, and a 3-3 appeared; their first three on three match. Harry looked over to the left box, and saw the names that appeared: on one side, Cho Chang, Draco Malfoy, and Justin Finch-Fletchley. On the other: Ernie Macmillan, Dean Thomas, and Seamus Finnigan.

"Would Miss. Chang, Mr. Malfoy, Mr. Finch-Fletchley and Mr. Macmillan, Mr. Thomas, and Mr. Finnigan please get ready for the next duel!" said Professor Flitwick excitedly. The six of them eagerly walked to the center of the circle, ready for a good group fight.

"Yeah, go Cho!" cheered Harry. Cho smiled at him, and raised her wand, ready to go. Though the teams were fairly evenly matched, the favor was leaning towards her team. Cho and Malfoy had shown their talent at their last duel, so they definitely gave their team better odds.

"Ten... nine... eight... sevensixfivefourthreeone go!" squealed Professor Flitwick.

"Kooverta Maximus!" said Cho.

"Expelliarmus!" yelled Justin. A beam shot out of Justin's wand, flying towards Dean Thomas. A shield appeared in front of their team.

"Kooverta!" yelled Dean. A small shield appeared in front of him, which would block the Disarming Spell.

"Apoyiosi!" yelled Malfoy suddenly. His ray hit the tip of the Disarming Spell, sending it bouncing over Dean's shield, and hitting him on the head, causing him to fly backwards, dropping his wand.

"One down, two to go," said Malfoy, sneering. "Fotia Circo!" A line of flames burst from his wand, splitting into two. The two split fire lines circled around Ernie and Seamus,

meeting on the other side, forming a circle of flames around them. The flames rose higher, trapping them.

“Nero Poli!” yelled Seamus, aiming at the flames. A ball of water shot out, and hit the flames, but they weren’t affected.

“Those are magical flames, Finnigan,” laughed Malfoy, “water won’t work on it.” The flames grew larger, closing in on Ernie and Seamus, forcing them closer to the center of the circle. Ernie looked slightly panicked, but Seamus remained cool. He pointed his wand at himself.

“Fters!” he yelled. Some small wings popped out of his back. He grabbed Ernie, and flew out of the circle of flames, flying a short distance over to the other side, then soaring higher up.

“Get ready Ernie,” said Seamus. He pointed his wand at Ernie with one hand, and held him with the other. “Kamikazus!” Ernie went stiff, and he turned a deep red color all over. Seamus let go of him, and Ernie fell to the floor.

“Get out of the way!” yelled Malfoy, pushing Justin and Cho out of the way of falling Ernie. As soon as he hit the ground, he exploded with the force of a giant bomb, causing smoke and fire to pour out. Dust and smoke filled the air for a while, and when it cleared, Harry saw that where Ernie had hit the floor, there was now a giant crater, with his body inside it. Justin was also on the floor, and Cho had collapsed on top of him. They both got hit from the blast. Malfoy, however, was still standing, looking determined.

“That was clever!” yelled Malfoy to Seamus, who was flying back and forth in the air. “Sacrifice one of yours to get two of mine! You have the mind of a businessman, Finnigan!” Seamus smirked.

“Expelliarmus!” he yelled from up at the ceiling. Since the spell took a while to travel from where he was to Malfoy, he easily dodged it.

“Hereuius!” yelled Malfoy. His spell was quick, hitting Seamus in less than a second. When the spell hit Seamus, he started shaking all over. Harry thought he was having a seizure at first, but then, he saw that Seamus was laughing. But, he wasn’t just laughing, he was exploding with painful joy. He was holding his sides too tight to keep them from splitting as he was laughing so much, he started drooling.

Seamus forgot to stay in the air, and fell to the ground, rolling with laughter. Malfoy walked up to him, and took the wand out of his hand. Seamus didn’t even try to hold on to his wand, he was too busy holding himself.

“You can end your laughing fit now,” said Malfoy, tapping Seamus with his wand. He suddenly stopped laughing, and glared at Malfoy who was smiling.

“Mr. Malfoy, Miss. Chang, and Mr. Finch-Fletchley are the winners!” said Professor Flitwick, bouncing out of his chair with excitement. Malfoy spun his wand around like a cowboy would a gun, and blew on it, laughing with Crabbe and Goyle. By now, Cho, Justin, Ernie, and Dean had recovered from the spells, and were up, walking back to their spots in the circle, ready to see the next duel.

“That was an excellent demonstration of some very good spells!” said Professor Flitwick. “Using the Launching Charm to make the spell bounce over the shield, that was quick thinking Mr. Malfoy. Utilizing the Kamikaze Spell, Mr. Finnigan, while highly dangerous, was ingenious. Also, the Tickling Charm, one of my personal favorites, was also a nice touch Mr. Malfoy.”

Malfoy smirked, he was enjoying the praise that Professor Flitwick was giving him. Even though he was evil, he wasn’t stupid. He knew how to think, and Harry had to be careful dueling him, he was an extremely formidable opponent.

Professor Flitwick tapped the right box again, preparing for the next duel. The box flashed red, and a 1-2 appeared. He tapped the left one, and everyone’s eyes darted towards it as the names appeared. Professor Flitwick read them off,

“The duel will be... Mr. Aylar Dumbledore with Mr. Neville Longbottom against... Mr. Harry Potter!”

Harry felt all eyes go towards him, the dueling champion. He, however, was not feeling confident at all. He would have to go against Aylar, the greatest student wizard he’d ever seen! Aylar, however, wasn’t looking too excited about the match either. He eyed Neville as if he were some hideous blob, and resented the fact that he was teamed up with him. He rolled his eyes as he walked to one side of the ring. Neville tripped on Aylar’s feet, causing Aylar to sigh as he picked him up.

“You’ll do fine,” said Ron, patting him on the back as Harry walked to the side of the ring opposite of Aylar and Neville. “Neville will hurt him more than he’ll help him!” Harry grinned, butterflies throwing up in his stomach. He brandished his wand, staring at his opponents, trying to look assured.

“On your marks... get set... go!” screamed Professor Flitwick, jumping out of his chair with excitement.

“Poli Omihi!” yelled Aylar, sending a heavy cloud of foam right at Harry’s face. It exploded right in front of him, causing his glasses to become clouded and foggy, and to fall back a few steps.

“Maherius!” yelled Harry, frantically waving his wand with one hand, trying to aim towards Aylar and Neville, wiping his face with his other. He heard Neville cry with pain and yell something as Harry wiped the last few suds from his face. When he got his

vision back, he saw Aylar lying on the floor, and Neville holding two wands, yelling, “I’m sorry!”

Harry didn’t have time to think of what had happened.

“Megola Heri!” yelled Harry. A giant hand shot out of his wand, with a faint, gassy tail behind it. It floated over to Neville, and slapped him on the head, causing him to fall on the ground, along with the two wands he was holding. Aylar quickly got back to his senses, and grabbed his wand. He tried going for Neville’s, but Harry was quicker,

“Accio wand!” he yelled. The wand flew right into Harry’s hand, and he put it into his pocket. Aylar sprung to his feet, and started circling the ring of people.

“Hand!” yelled Harry. The giant hand he conjured flew over to him, and Harry jumped on top of it. He soared high into the air, leaving Aylar stranded on the ground.

“Porcini Magus!” came Aylar’s tiny voice from below. A pinkish beam flew up to Harry, and hit him on the forehead. Harry felt his body become very warm, and saw his skin turn pink. He felt his fingers start to melt together, and become hard and black. It suddenly daunted on him what was happening to him: he was turning into a pig!

“Anthropi Magus!” yelled Harry, pointing the wand at himself. It was the counter curse for the transformation spell. Harry’s spell hit his face, but it was too late for the rest of his body. His torso was now perfectly round and pink, and his legs and arms were no more than large hams with hooves at the end. He looked extremely odd, the body of a pig with the head of a human.

Harry tried to grip his wand, but he realized that he didn’t have fingers anymore. He looked down at his hand and saw that his fingers had fused around the wand he was holding, and now his wand was impaled through his hoof. Even though it was going through him, rather than him holding onto it, Harry could still use it. He pointed it at Aylar, from up in the air.

“Siragus!” yelled Harry. No beam shot out of his wand, but there was an explosion right next to Aylar, and a giant hole appeared.

“Siragus!” yelled Harry again, and again, still aiming for Aylar. Each time, however, Aylar jumped out of the way. They had completed a full circle now, and Aylar was right Next to Neville.

“Siragus!” yelled Harry one last time. The explosion hit Neville as Aylar bounced out of the way. However, Neville flew up from the force of the explosion just as Aylar was jumping over him. Neville crashed into Aylar, sending both of them to the ground, and their wands flying.

“Accio!” said Harry. The wands flew right at him, and, having no hands, he caught them in his mouth. Harry directed the giant hand back down to the ground where Professor Flitwick was fixing the holes in the ground, and tending to Neville and Aylar.

“Congratulations Harry,” said Professor Flitwick. “Only next time, try not to destroy the entire room to win.”

“Sorry, professor,” said Harry, grinning, still having the body of a pig. When Aylar and Neville had woken up, Professor Flitwick turned to Harry, and transformed his body back. Neville stood up, and started apologizing to Aylar, for his mistakes. Aylar, however, paid him no attention as he walked back to his spot in the circle, arms folded.

“If it hadn’t been for that idiot,” said Aylar to himself, indicating Neville, “I would’ve easily won. First he hit me with his own spell, then he hit me with his... body. Arg, the fool.”

Aylar’s and Neville’s names disappeared from the box as Harry was welcomed back to his spot by Ron and Hermione. Professor Flitwick had just finished raising the ground that Harry had blown away, and was floating back to his chair. He tapped the boxes again, and everyone watched, to see what appeared.

After a few seconds, a small 3-2 appeared, causing the next box to show its names. The first two names that came up were,

“Miss. Ginny Weasley, and Mr. Justin Finch-Fletchley!” announced Professor Flitwick. They both entered the circle. “And on the other team... Mr. Tci... Mr. Draco Malfoy... and... Mr. Harry Potter!”

Amid the cheering of people, eager to see the next duel, Harry’s mind was racing. He would have to compete with Malfoy on his team? His greatest enemy was supposed to be his ally?

It took a shove from an angry looking Ron to get Harry out of his dazed state, and with the rest of his team. He walked slowly and sadly over to Tci and Malfoy, who were discussing tactics. Harry, however, was still tired from his last duel.

“Alright Harry,” said Tci. “Okay, we’ve got a pretty good plan right now-”

“Yeah, so don’t screw it up, Potter,” grinned Malfoy. Harry shot him a look that shut him up.

“Anyway, what we’re going to do is go for Justin first. Even though Ginny’s better, losing her ally will hurt her more than actually hitting her. She’s easily weakened by the feeling of loneliness. All we have to do is take out Justin, and the duel is in the bag.”

“And how are we going to do that?” asked Malfoy.

“Well, I propose a group effort. Malfoy, you distract Ginny by-”

“No way,” said Malfoy, looking quite serious. “There’s no way I’m even going to think about hurting Ginny!” Tci and Harry stared at him.

“Okay then Malfoy,” said Tci, “I’ll distract Ginny, and you two worry about Justin. Harry, if you could blast a hole, and then Malfoy, if you cover it, we’ll be good.”

“Alright,” said Harry.

“Whatever,” said Malfoy, standing up from the huddle.

Harry looked around, from the sight of it, everyone looked as though they were ready to duel, including Ginny and Justin. Tci got into his usual fighting stance, and Professor Flitwick began his countdown.

“Eenie... meenie... miney... go!” he yelled.

“Expelliarmus!” yelled Ginny, aiming for Harry. Harry quickly ducked out of the way, and rolled over to the side, getting closer to Justin, ready to put him into a hole.

“Ballano!” yelled Tci. A massive, gray ball popped out of his wand, and started rolling towards Ginny, easily distracting her from Malfoy and Harry. Malfoy was already next to Justin, opposite of Harry.

“Siragus!” yelled Harry, aiming for Justin’s feet. Just as he was about to react, a giant hole appeared beneath his feet, and smoke started pouring out of it. He fell right inside of it. Malfoy then walked up to the hole.

“Sendoni Asimi!” he yelled. A thin, silvery sheet flew out of his wand like a fountain. It quickly covered the hole, leaving no escape for Justin. He tried to jump and fly out of the hole, but the sheet pushed him back down. He was trapped. If Harry hadn’t hated Malfoy to the core, he would’ve given him a high-five.

Harry looked over, and saw Ginny, still being chased by Tci with the massive, metal ball. However, once she looked over, and saw that her comrade was trapped in a hole, she stopped dead in her tracks. She just stared, looking frightened, surprised, and sad at the same time... allowing the ball to hit her. The force of the collision sent her flying forward, and landing on her face. Tci ran over, and merely picked up the wand from out of her hand.

“The match is over!” squealed Professor Flitwick. “Mr. Malfoy, Mr. Tci, and Mr. Potter win!” Tci put his jacket back on, and Malfoy took a bow, laughing as he walked back to his spot in the circle. Professor Flitwick sighed as he got rid of the silver sheet, and pulled Justin out.

“Come now Mr. Finch-Fletchley,” said Professor Flitwick. “A simple Maxilari Spell would’ve gotten rid of the sheet, you should know that.” Justin nodded groggily, and rubbed his head. He had hit it against the hard sheet so much, it must have really hurt. Justin helped Ginny up, and she walked back to her spot next to Malfoy. She didn’t look too disappointed about her defeat, in fact, she was laughing about it with Malfoy.

“Another excellent example of teamwork,” said Professor Flitwick. “Even though it was a fairly quick match, I congratulate you three on your brief camaraderie.” Harry and Malfoy glared at each other, and Malfoy stuck out his tongue. They had no camaraderie. The only reason they worked together was because Tci told them to.

“Our next match is about to begin,” said Professor Flitwick, drumming the boxes with his wand. A 2-3 appeared. On the other box, the five names appeared: Fred Weasley, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger grouped together on one side, and Tci and Cho Chang grouped together on the other. Harry gave Ron and Hermione thumbs-up as they walked out to the dueling ring, joining Fred., looking very nervous since they had to battle Tci.

“Red light... yellow light... green light... go!” yelled Professor Flitwick.

“Expelliarmus!” yelled Cho.

“Tri Oplo!” yelled Tci.

The three orbs shot out of Tci’s Swand first, hitting Fred, Ron, and Hermione simultaneously, and knocking them over, causing Fred to be unable to dodge Cho’s Disarming Spell. It was a direct hit, and his wand flew out of his hand, and right into Cho’s pocket.

“Once down, two to go,” said Cho, winking at Harry. He waved weakly back, feeling extremely torn inside. Should he root for his friends, or his girlfriend?

“Ekathormirio Oplo!” yelled Hermione, looking fierce, pointing her wand directly at Tci and Cho. Evidently, in the excitement of the match, she had forgotten her logical moves. Her wand started to shake a little, then there was a small explosion at the tip as thousands upon thousands of small balls shot out of it, flying right towards Cho and Tci.

“Fotia Porta!” yelled Tci, not loosing his cool. A large, spinning disc shot out of his wand, and flames grew around the edges of it. There was a red swirling in the center, it looked stunningly like a portal, and indeed it was. The balls that were flying towards him and Cho instead hit the fiery portal, and were sucked inside, transporting them somewhere else. It wasn’t long before all the balls were gone, and the portal collapsed on itself with a loud crack.

Hermione and Ron were so distracted by Tci and the portal, that they didn’t notice Cho sneaking up behind them.

“Sovrako Pano!” she yelled, surprising them. Immediately, Hermione and Ron bent over, as if pushed over by some invisible force, and the most humiliating moment of their lives began. Their underpants came flying up, held by another invisible force, giving them an extreme pain in their backside. Their underwear kept getting pulled higher and higher, but they still remained on the floor, bent over. Ron and Hermione’s faces were a dark red, and they both had tears in their eyes from the embarrassment and the pain. Soon, it became too much. They both dropped their wands.

There was a loud ripping noise, and the invisible force let go, but not before Cho picked up their wands, holding them high in the air. Hermione didn’t stick around, she left the Great Hall, crying the entire way out. Ron, however, stayed, but jumped back to his spot in the circle. Everyone was still laughing when Fred was awakened by Professor Flitwick.

“That girlfriend of yours, Harry,” said Ron, rubbing his backside, “she’s bad news. That Wedgie Spell is lethal!”

“Oh Ron,” said Harry, “come on. It was just a little spell.”

“Yeah, but there were a million other spells she could’ve used. Why did it have to be the one that would embarrass us the most?” Harry shrugged.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I’ll talk to her afterwards.... I just hope she doesn’t use it on me!” Ron glared at him.

“Who’s ready for the next round?” said Professor Flitwick, highly excited. Everyone cheered, this could be their last round if four people were in it... all that were left were Harry, Tci, Cho, and Malfoy.

Professor Flitwick tapped the boxes for possibly the last time, and everyone looked as the number appeared; it was another 1-3.

Harry swallowed hard, what if he was the one against the other three? What if he had to fight against Cho?

Professor Flitwick tapped the other box nervously, as if he almost didn’t want to see who was going to be slaughtered. Then, four names appeared on the box, and he read them off.

“The teams are... Mr. Tci, Mr. Malfoy and Miss. Chang against Mr. Potter.”

Harry was shocked beyond belief. He had to go against three very good people, one of which he had a relationship with. What was he going to do?

“You’re going to do your best,” said Ron, as if he head heard what Harry had thought. He was still rubbing his behind when he pushed Harry into the ring.

Harry, however, didn't need the push. He walked with his head held high into the circle, feeling an odd and sudden burst of courage. He faced his three opponents, Tci in his usual pose, Malfoy looking as if Christmas had come early, and Cho looking almost terrified. Harry brandished his wand, ready for a surprise and great opening attack.

"Ein... zwei... drei... go!" squealed Professor Flitwick. Even though he felt sorry for Harry, he was still excited to witness another good match.

"Thalasa Maximus!" yelled Harry. Not a small fountain, but an enormous waterfall of liquid exploded forth from his wand, flowing all over the room, flooding it to several feet high within seconds. The only piece of land left was the small, artificial floor under Harry that the spell had produced, and a larger rectangular base that Professor Flitwick had quickly conjured for him and the rest of the duelers to get on.

Harry's opening move did take Malfoy, Cho, and Tci by surprise. Not only had they not expected it, and were not prepared for it at all: all three of them were now deep underwater. It was time for Harry's next move.

"Electa Maximus!" he yelled, pointing at the ocean he had created. A bolt of lightning shot out from the tip of his wand, and hit the water, spreading all over, including where Tci, Cho, and Malfoy were. The electricity flowed through the water, and right to them, shocking them all... or at least Harry thought it did. Suddenly, Tci and Malfoy jumped out of the water, holding Cho, who looked unconscious. Tci and Malfoy, however, looked as though they had not been affected by the electricity.

"Fucillius!" yelled Tci, aiming right at Harry. He didn't have time to react. The spell hit him with the force, and pain, of a bullet right in the chest. Harry curled over with the pain, it was excruciating, feeling the cold metal inside his warm body, pushing against his quickly beating organs.

Harry pulled down his cloak slightly, to see how badly he was bleeding, when he saw that he wasn't at all. There was no sign of bleeding, or any puncture at all. Tci had just given Harry some imaginary pain, like the Maherius Curse.

Knowing this, Harry quickly shoved the painful thoughts out of his mind, pulled his cloak back up, and jumped up onto his feet, seeing Malfoy and Tci's surprised faces.

"Expelliarmus!" Harry yelled, aiming for Tci. The beam shot right at him, but he ducked just in time to avoid it.

"Anemos!" yelled Malfoy, aiming at the water in front of Harry. A string wind blew out from his wand, and hit the water, forcing a wave to appear. Tci was holding the wave in place, right in front of Harry, as Malfoy fed it more and more water by blowing air. The height of the wave quickly reached the ceiling, and Tci stopped holding it up. It came collapsing down on itself, right onto Harry.

Harry quickly transformed his back into his wings, and flew off to the side as fast as he could, avoiding the wave. It hit his small island, sending it underwater, underneath a new island of sea foam.

“Locomotor Mortis!” yelled Harry from up near the ceiling, aiming right at Tci. The beam shot out of his wand too fast for Tci to react, and it hit him, making his legs freeze like a rock. Seeing the opportunity, Harry flew over, closer to Tci.

“Expelliarmus!” he yelled, aiming at Tci’s frozen legs. The spell hit him, as expected, and sent his wand right into Harry’s hand. He then shot over to Cho, who was right next to Tci, and picked her wand up too.

“Ohi Ptisi!” yelled Malfoy. Harry recognized the spell as the counter spell for the Wings Charm. His spell hit Harry’s back, but it did nothing. Unless Harry wanted it to be revealed that he was Animagus, the wings had to go.

Harry gave in, and transformed his wings into his normal back while still in the air. He fell down from the ceiling, splashing into the water.

“Aftokinito Pisco!” yelled Harry, treading water. A massive fish popped right out of his wand. It was a magnificent fish, glowing all the colors of the rainbow, with large silvery eyes. Harry jumped onto its back, and pointed his wand towards Malfoy, who was hovering slightly above the water, next to the disarmed Tci, and unconscious Cho.

“So, Potter,” said Malfoy mockingly, “once again, it’s come down to us.”

“Exactly like before,” said Harry. Malfoy sneered.

“Not exactly, Potter. There will be one difference this time... I will win.”

“Don’t count on it.”

“Fotia Poli!” yelled Malfoy. A beam of fire shot out from his wand. Harry ducked out of the way by turning his fish, and the fire hit the water. Surprisingly, though, the water did not put the fire out, it suddenly burst into flames, and began spreading all over the giant sea. Malfoy was laughing.

“How did you do that?” asked Harry.

“Potter, you have to stop thinking about reality when dealing with magic. It’s not a rock-paper-scissors game of fire, water and electricity in magic, of one being able to defeat one other, wile being weakened by another. No, in magic, it is a caste system: with fire at the top. Anything is flammable.”

The sea of water was now a hellish inferno. There was not a drop of water anywhere, and Harry’s fish that he was riding on was now a pile of ash. The platforms that Professor

Flitwick, Tci, Cho, and the other students were now floating high above the flames, leaving Malfoy and Harry close to the ground, being burned. The smoke and heat were become overwhelming.

“Aqua Nero,” gasped Harry. A thin cloud popped out of his wand but, instead of it floating over to Malfoy, it stayed on top of Harry, raining down on him, and putting out some of the flames around him. Harry looked up, and saw that Malfoy had done the same thing.

“Stupefy!” yelled Malfoy.

“Bakatcha!” yelled Harry. The small mirror popped up in front of him just as the beam was about to hit his face. The spell hit the mirror, and bounced back at Malfoy, taking him by surprise, and hitting him. He collapsed onto the ground.

Harry ran up to him, ready to pluck the wand right out of his hand. He pointed his wand’s tip at Malfoy’s, ready to perform the Summoning Charm.

“Siragus!” yelled Malfoy suddenly, jumping up, and scaring Harry. The force of the Explosion Spell being used directly on him was overpowering. He felt a massive spherical force, greater than anything he could’ve ever believed possible, push him backwards, upwards, down, left and right all at the same time. He felt like he was being torn apart from the inside out. He felt smoke pouring out of him from all directions, heating his skin to unbearable temperatures. Harry collapsed onto the ground, breathing hard. His cloud was gone, and the heat from the fire all around him was affecting him again.

He heard Malfoy walking up to him, prepared to finish him off, take his wand, and declare himself greater than Harry Potter. He would smile, and everyone would cheer for him, thinking him to be the greatest dueler. Harry couldn’t allow that.

“Oplo!” yelled Harry, jumping up to his feet. It was a direct hit right in the stomach. Malfoy stumbled backwards, and lost his breath. Harry raised his wand, feeling dizzy from the smoke, ready to perform another Orb Spell, when Malfoy took out his wand, and muttered something. Something large and green appeared, so large, it almost touched the top of the ceiling.

Harry stumbled backwards, and fell down, looking up at what Malfoy had summoned. He looked up with glazed and foggy eyes, on the verge of collapse. His head was hurting with the smoke clogging his brain and a sharp pain all over his forehead. Harry looked up, and saw what Malfoy had conjured, and he fainted.

## **Chapter 24- The Quidditch Final**

Harry sat up, and brandished his wand at Malfoy again. Even though the room was foggy and smoky from the fire, he could make out Malfoy perfectly, just standing there, thinking he'd won.

"Expelliarmus!" yelled Harry, as loud as he could, which was only about a whisper. The thin beam shot towards Malfoy, very slowly; Harry could see it growing every second. He waited for what felt like an eternity for the beam to finally hit Malfoy. The spell hit him, but it did nothing. He just stood there, glowing, laughing at Harry.

What was going on? His laughter was getting louder and louder. It was an earsplitting noise that forced Harry to cover his ears. His face was splitting open with pain. Harry let out a single scream....

And woke up. He was in a bed in the Hospital Wing. Sweat was pouring down his head like a faucet, and he was barely clothed.

What was going on? Harry tried to remember what had happened: he was dueling Malfoy, and then something happened... but did he just dream that? Suddenly, the curtain around him was thrown open by Madam Pomfrey.

"You have some visitors," she said. "You should be fully recovered soon, so I let them in." She walked out of the way, and Ron, Hermione, Cho, and Ginny appeared. Harry, embarrassed at having nothing more than his boxers on, pulled his covers up to his chin.

"Wha- um... well- yeah... so... um.... Hello...." stuttered Harry. Cho threw her arms around him, causing him to blush slightly.

"Oh thank goodness you're okay, Harry," she said.

"Why, what happened?" asked Harry. His brain was still feeling fuzzy.

"That's what we're trying to figure out," said Ron.

"What? You mean, you don't know?" asked Harry. All four of them shook their heads.

"All we know is that you've been unconscious for an entire day," said Hermione.

"The rest of it's still a mystery," said Ginny.

"Well, what do you know?" asked Harry.

"Well... Malfoy used some kind of spell that produced a large beast. No one really got a good look at it since as soon as you fainted, he made it disappear. Once it was gone, we found you on the floor, unconscious. The smoke from the fire probably got to you."

“Either that or the spell Malfoy used,” said Ron.

“Or from the shock of seeing what he conjured,” said Cho.

“What spell did he use?” asked Harry.

“I... we don’t know,” said Hermione. This came as a shock to Harry. If anyone would know what spell Malfoy had used, it would have been her. “I’ve never seen anything like it before.”

“So...” said Harry slowly, “Malfoy beat me... he won the duel....” Everyone except for Ginny sighed. She put her hands on her sides.

“Really now,” she said, “can’t you just be happy for Draco?”

“Ginny,” said Ron flatly, “nobody here will ever feel happy for Malfoy, and no one here knows why you do.”

“Oh you guys,” said Ginny arrogantly, “you just don’t know the true Draco. What you see is some twisted version of him, molded by his father. Whenever he’s not thinking about his dad, or his plans, he’s really... sweet.” Harry, Ron, and Hermione shuddered at the thought of a “sweet” Malfoy.

“Well, I just wish I could’ve beaten that... ‘sweet’ Malfoy,” said Harry.

“Don’t worry,” said Hermione, “you’ll get your chance again.”

“What do you mean?”

“Remember? The day after the Quidditch final, the day before the O.W.L.s, we’re going to have another duel, at breakfast, for the entire school to watch. You can get him back then.”

“Great,” sighed Harry, “I couldn’t even beat him today. How could I possibly even fare against him the day after the Quidditch Final, and the day before the biggest test of my life?”

Harry was let out of the hospital with his friends, he had apparently gotten over whatever had caused him to faint, and there was no point in holding him any longer. Instead of enjoying the rest of the day off, though, Harry collapsed into his bed, and fell asleep. The next day, though, he didn’t get much of a break. He had Animagus lessons in the morning with Ron and Hermione. The lessons, however, were more fun than they usually were. Professor McGonagall seemed to be in a good mood about something, and instead of staying inside her small office for their lesson, they went outside, far into the grounds and had their lesson there.

For the first time, Harry flew through the open air as a gryffin. It was a wonderful experience, even better than flying with just the wings. The gryffin's body was surprisingly more aerodynamic than a human's, so Harry could shoot through the air at fantastic speeds, leaving birds miles behind him.

After several hours of flying around, and getting used to staying as a gryffin, Harry flew back down to Professor McGonagall, where Ron and Hermione were; Ron as the chameleon, and Hermione as the unicorn. Professor McGonagall clapped her hands together, and smiled.

"I'm very proud to announce," she said happily, "that you three are now almost official Animagi."

"Almost official?" asked Hermione, morphing from her wonderfully beautiful unicorn body into her human form.

"Yes," said Professor McGonagall, "I can clearly see that you are all perfectly able to transform quickly and efficiently, and hold your transformations for as long as you would like. The only step left is to register you three."

"And when will we be registered?" asked Ron, swiftly popping out of his tiny chameleon form.

"You will all be registered as Animagi on May 28<sup>th</sup>, it is the one day I have off for quite a while. Until then, I urge you not to... 'show off' your abilities to anyone. Alright?" The three of them nodded their heads.

"Professor..." said Harry.

"Yes, Potter?"

"Is Malfoy going to be an official Animagus too?" As soon as these words left his mouth, Professor McGonagall made a rare expression: she smiled.

"More or less," she said, still smiling. "While he'll be registered, it won't be as an Animagus, but a Polymagus." Harry sighed.

"Are we ever going to see what he can become?"

"Oh... you'll see soon enough, Potter," she said. What was she talking about? Was Malfoy planning to surprise him at night or something? No, Professor McGonagall would've told him if it was something like that. It wasn't like her to act like this.

Before Harry could ask any more follow-up questions, he felt himself being dragged away by Ron and Hermione, all the way back up to the castle.

"Come on Harry, grumbled Hermione, "we've got to study for the O.W.L.s, and I don't want to get anything less than a perfect, especially because of you." Harry got up, and walked back to the castle, discussing possibilities for what Malfoy's animal could be.

"Well, I've read a few things on Polymagi—" said Hermione when they arrived in the library.

"She had to have read something on it," whispered Ron, "she's read every book in this entire library."

"-and I've found out that what most of them... or at least three out of all five of them... have not transformed into several different animals, but combined several animals together, to make one superior one."

"So Malfoy definitely has the advantage..." said Harry. If Malfoy had put together some of the nastiest creatures on Earth, there may be no stopping him, especially if he worked for Voldemort, which he was almost certainly doing already.

They studied for the rest of the day, just sitting there, reading books. It was very dull work, and Harry was glad when it came time to go to bed, though the next several days weren't any more entertaining. All his classes were still review. However, Hagrid told them what his Advance O.W.L. requirement would be.

"Well, y'all ar' gonna' fight yer dragons 'gainst on' an other. The final four left'll get th' Advanced O.W.L." It seemed simple enough, it was like a duel. Each dragon would fight another randomly chosen one, and the last four standing gave their owners the Advanced O.W.L.

To get ready for this challenge, Hagrid decided to devote the rest of the year to training the dragons how to fight well. They used their books to figure out how to toughen up their dragons, and found out that flying was the best exercise for them. So, each student hopped up onto their dragon, and attempted to make it fly. It would have been a very strange sight for anyone, seeing almost twenty students trying to mount dragons, and poorly fly them through the sky, wobbling all over.

Harry's massive Hungarian Horntail (now fully grown, and the size of ten of Hagrid's huts) proved to be very obedient. At just the slightest command of him waving his wand, the dragon would immediately turn to wherever Harry wanted.

Other students were not as lucky. Hermione's Three-Headed Transylvanian Terror was living up to its name. It was the size of two school buses, but did not move like them. No matter how much Hermione pointed, the dragon would not move an inch. All it did was throw her off its back.

Ron was doing quite well. His dragon, like Harry's, obeyed his every command, going wherever he wanted it to go, even though its top speed seemed to be less than one mile an hour. The African Abysmal was getting larger every day, and not vertically.

It was Malfoy, though, he seemed to be the best at flying his dragon. He didn't even use his wand, he just leaned over to the side, and his dragon moved along with him. He and the dragon seemed to have some sort of bond, a connection that no one else, not even Harry, could surpass.

The weeks, soon turning into months, passed on like that. Winter was far in the past, and Spring was just ending. It was mid May, and just about time for the fifth years to take their O.W.L.s, and the seventh years to take their finals, the dreaded N.E.W.T.s. Harry was amazed at how fast the year seemed to go by, and how little dark activity was going on. Harry tried to amuse himself with thinking that Voldemort was taking a vacation. But, the second he thought about that, he remembered how evil and twisted Voldemort was, and knowing him, he was planning something horrid.

Harry, however, apart from the other students, had something else to think about that wasn't involved with the O.W.L.s, the Quidditch final, or anything that had to do with school at all... his mom's birthday was coming up, May 30<sup>th</sup>, the day he was going to revive her. That was what got Harry through this immensely stressful time, the thought of him being reunited with his mother, for the rest of his life.

The last week of school finally arrived, and Harry was psyched up.

"First up... the Quidditch final... us against Slytherin... yet again," he said to himself, marking off on his calendar, before he went to bed, after an exhausting, final Quidditch practice. He had four big things to do in a row, and tomorrow kicked it off. Harry collapsed onto his bed, and groaned. He felt something he had not even thought about for quite a while... another note.

Harry reached under his pillow, and grabbed the small piece of wrinkled parchment. This time, however, the note was written very nice and neatly, in dark red ink.

Harry Potter, prepare to scream,

For this note is not a dream.

I know what you did, and will never forget,

Confess to me, or you shall dearly pay, I'll bet.

You will never escape my undying wrath,

If you succeed, prepare to take a bloody bath.

Harry crumpled up the note, yet again. He had gotten several of these notes all year long, and not one time had the person who had seen him take Fawkes acted out on any of their threats, and this one was going to be no different. He threw the crumpled parchment into the trash, and fell asleep.

“Captains, shake hands,” said Madam Hooch. The Quidditch final was about to begin, and this was the first step towards its beginning. Harry walked towards the center of the Quidditch field, amid the cheers of his fellow Gryffindors, and his teammates. He grabbed Marcus Flint’s massive hand, and shook it up and down.

As Harry was shaking Flint’s hand, two thoughts went through his head:

“I should’ve had breakfast,” and, “We can’t lose, we’re undefeated...” But then, he thought, Slytherin had only lost one match, they were still pretty good. But who did they lose that match to?

“Us,” Harry reminded himself out loud.

“We’re gonna crush you,” said Flint, letting go of Harry’s hand and smiling.

The rest of the Slytherin team walked up next to him, and mounted their brooms. Though Flint was right in front of him, the only opponent Harry could see was Malfoy, and his egotistical smirk. Harry wondered what kind of animal was living behind that face of his.

Madam Hooch threw the Snitch into the air, followed by the two Bludgers. She grabbed the Quaffle, and Lee Jordan’s voice rang out.

“Three... two... one... go!” he yelled. Madam Hooch threw the Quaffle into the air, and the game began.

All the players immediately became a blur as they shot off in every direction. Ron flew towards the Gryffindor goals, and the Slytherin Keeper flew towards his goals just as fast. Harry let Alicia, Angelina, and Katie work their Quaffle magic as he soared out of the way, flying about the perimeter of the field, searching for any sign of the golden Snitch.

“And this is the Quidditch final on this lovely summer day, just two days before the O.W.L.s and the N.E.W.T.s,” rang Lee Jordan’s voice. “And what a game it is so far! Gryffindor is in possession of the Quaffle- no Slytherin- no Gryffindor! Wow, look at those Chasers go!”

“Ready to lose again, Potter?” came Malfoy’s voice from across the field. Though it was hard to hear him over the cheering and announcing, Harry understood him perfectly.

“You’d better get ready to lose, Malfoy,” said Harry, turning sharply to avoid a Bludger. “You’re going to lose today, and tomorrow’s duel.” Malfoy sneered.

“My magic took you out before, and it will do it again,” he smirked before he shot off. So it was one of his spells that caused Harry to faint. Harry started going over in his head what Malfoy could have done, when Lee Jordan shouted,

“Gryffindor scores! Ten to nothing!” The Gryffindor stands erupted in cheers as the Quaffle quickly found its way back into the playing field, and into the game. Harry continued searching the field, looking for any sign of the Snitch. Then, he saw it. A tiny, sharp, hint of gold, right in the middle of the field. It was just hovering there unaware that it was going to be caught.

Harry leaned into his broom, and put his feet back, blasting towards the Snitch, becoming a blur. He was about fifty feet away from catching it when Malfoy saw him. He flew towards the Snitch too, just as fast as Harry.

It was soon discovered that they were on a collision course, and a very painful one at that. Harry saw Malfoy flying right towards him, on the opposite side of the field. It was a game of chicken, only on broomsticks, and whoever turned away would lose the game for the team. If Harry turned away, he would save himself a lot of pain, but it would leave the Snitch easily accessible to Malfoy. Harry continued flying, giving a sudden and quick burst of speed.

Malfoy seemed to be thinking the same way as Harry, he didn’t look any more willing to give in. He just kept flying towards the Snitch, faster and faster. Harry was now just twenty feet away from the Snitch (Malfoy’s going to move any second now), fifteen feet (come on, move!), ten feet (oh no, are we going to hit?), five feet (should I swerve?). He was close enough to see the whites of Malfoy’s eyes, when a Bludger came between them both, hitting the stationary Snitch, sending it flying all the way across the field. Fred Weasley zoomed between them as well, chasing the Bludger, giving a quick apology to Harry as he flew by. Harry and Malfoy skidded to a sudden stop, almost touching. Malfoy spat at Harry, and then he shot off. The Snitch wouldn’t be visible for a while, it wasn’t worth it to chase it now.

Harry went back to scouting the field. He flew higher up, so the entire arena would be visible. He kept an eye out for any sign of the Snitch, and when he looked over at the Gryffindor goals, he saw that Slytherin had scored.

“Ten to ten,” said Lee Jordan, not quite as enthusiastically as when Gryffindor had scored. The Slytherin crowd, however, erupted into applause and cheers. Harry even saw Tci, the Gryffindor wannabe, join in on some of the cheering this time.

The Slytherin chasers were evidently doing well; Gryffindor usually had over fifty points by now. Harry had to try and get the Snitch as soon as possible. Gryffindor wasn’t going to get up in the hundred’s anytime soon, so if Malfoy got it, they’d definitely lose.

Harry glanced over the field even harder, looking for anything even slightly golden. He got caught off guard a few times by thinking some of the golden Gryffindor flags were the Snitch, but other than that, Harry couldn't see anything.

"Slytherin scores again," said Lee, "Twenty to ten."

Harry needed to find that Snitch. Just then, he had a thought: he'd improve his odds if he had more eyes. He flew over to the Gryffindor goal posts where Ron was busy flying back and forth.

"Hey Harry," he groaned, "sorry I let those last two get passed me, I--"

"It's okay, Ron," said Harry. "They're just really good. I doubt even Oliver could've stopped them from scoring." Ron grinned.

"What do you want?"

"I need you to help me look for the Snitch," said Harry.

"But, if I help you look for it, who will guard the goals?"

"We can sacrifice a few points for a whopping one-hundred-fifty," said Harry. Ron nodded, and flew a little away from his posts, scanning the area. Ron took one half of the stadium, and Harry took the other. They both got to concentrate harder on a smaller area, increasing their chances.

However, that bonus came with a price: the Slytherin chasers easily scored a goal on Gryffindor, Ron didn't even attempt to try and stop them.

"Thirty to ten, Slytherin," said Lee. "What's going on Gryffindor? Let's play this game! Come on!"

"What's the matter Potter?" said Malfoy, laughing, seeing both Ron and Harry looking around. "Need some help finding the Snitch? Ha, well, don't count on Weasley here to help you, the only thing that's smaller than his IQ is his parent's bank account!" He flew away, laughing to himself.

"Right over there," said Ron, gritting his teeth, trying not to let Malfoy's comment get to him. "I see it." He pointed towards the stands where Lee was. It was below his podium, so Lee was unable to see it, but Harry could see it perfectly. He patted Ron on the shoulder as he shot over to it, and Slytherin scored another goal.

"Forty to ten, Slytherin! What are you doing Gryffindor? I don't think you've showed up yet- ahh!" he yelled as he saw Harry flying right towards him.

Faster and faster Harry flew, emotions running through him, he had to get it, he had to get it.... He was only four feet away from it, he reached out his hand, ready to grab it, when suddenly, Malfoy crashed right into him.

He hit him like a tennis ball would hit a brick wall, Harry bounced right off. Malfoy hovered there, laughing, just feet away from the Snitch, while Harry tumbled in all directions in the air, holding onto his broom for dear life. The broom shook and wobbled from the impact force, and Harry fell off.

He reached up just in time to grab onto the very end of the bristles. The broom was holding him up, but it took a lot of strength to hold on. Harry's fingers started to hurt from holding on so hard to something so small. He looked up, and saw that Malfoy was still laughing, and that the Snitch was still next to him, ready to be plucked.

Malfoy then seemed to gain control of himself, and turned towards the Snitch.

"So much for me losing, eh Potter?" he snarled, as he moved in to get it. Harry gritted his teeth, he hated Malfoy.... Just then, a miracle happened. A Bludger came out of nowhere, and hit Malfoy right in the back of the head. Harry saw Malfoy's eyes bulge and spit and blood fly out of his mouth from the force of the impact. He fell off his broom as well, but did not manage to grab a hold of anything like Harry did, he just fell twenty feet, right onto the sandy ground.

Harry looked up, and saw that the Snitch was still there. But, it was too late. He couldn't hold on any longer. Harry lost his grip on the bristles, and fell.

As he was falling, though, a thought came to Harry. He didn't need a broom to fly... he had wings, he could transform! But, he didn't have a wand with him, so he couldn't make it look like he had used the Flight Charm. It was either reveal to everyone that he was an Animagus, or lose the Quidditch final.

"Well," Harry quickly thought to himself, "tomorrow everyone will find out when Professor McGonagall registers me." Harry chose to transform.

Just when he was a few feet above the ground, Harry shot the wings out of his back. He stopped where he was in the air, hovered for a second, ruffled his wings, then flew directly upwards, right towards the Snitch.

As Harry flew, he noticed that it was perfectly quiet. No one in the entire audience, or on the field was making a sound, not even Lee Jordan. All eyes were upon him, the Animagus boy. Harry felt slightly self-conscious, but kept on flying. He only stopped when he felt the cold metal of the Snitch inside his fingers.

The crowd erupted into an ear shattering applause. Everyone (except for the Slytherins) was cheering ecstatically. Gryffindor had won the Quidditch cup, one-hundred-sixty to forty. As Harry looked around the stadium, still flapping his wings, and hovering in the

air, a new feeling came over him. It wasn't a good feeling though... it was actually quite painful... and getting more painful by the second.

It felt as though his hand were covered in flaming bees, and they were all stinging him at once, burning his hand at the same time. Harry let out a scream, that wasn't heard by the cheering crowd, and looked at the hand that was holding the Snitch. Through the blood covering it all over, Harry saw that several spikes had protruded from the Snitch, and impaled themselves through his hand.

## **Chapter 25- The Final Duel**

“AAAHHH!” yelled Harry, as loud as he could, which wasn’t nearly enough to beat the cheering crowd. It wasn’t until the rest of the Gryffindor team came over, ready to congratulate Harry and begin a celebration party, that anyone else realized something was wrong.

“Get Madam Pomfrey!” yelled George to the approaching crowd of fellow Gryffindors, and some Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs when he saw the fountain of blood pouring out of Harry’s hand. There were some screams and yelps of fear, but luckily some of the students ran to get the nurse.

“Hold on Harry,” said Fred. He grabbed hold of Harry’s impaled hand and the Snitch, and pulled as hard as he could, trying to separate the two.

“AAAHHH!” yelled Harry. It was even more painful with Fred pulling on it, and it felt like it was only getting more secure. “Fred, you’re not helping!” Harry fumbled for his wand in his pocket, gritting his teeth, and squinting his watery eyes from the pain. He found it, and pointed it at his mangled hand with a shaky arm.

“Sendoni Farmaki!” he grimaced. A small, fluffy, white cloth shot out of his wand, and wrapped itself around his hand. Just as quickly as it had wrapped itself around, though, it became saturated in blood, and was turning from pure white, to a dark red.

Finally, Madam Pomfrey arrived, panting, with red cheeks, with a group of students behind her. She took one look at the bloody cloth, and started pulling Harry to the hospital wing, not saying a word.

It was by far the worst after-Quidditch event that had Harry ever taken part in; staying in the hospital wing for several hours, being constantly visited by people, some he didn’t even know. All of the annoying first year Gryffindors stopped by too: Joe wrote him some sort of incomprehensible get well note (|<3 j00 |-4rrY g3+ \V3\\_|\_ \$00|\!|), Mike made him one thousand paper cranes that quickly flew away, Akshay gave him some sort of odd and fluffy penguin that he called Tux, and Chris… well, we won’t say what Chris did....

The only thing good about Harry getting his hand impaled by a spiked Snitch was that it distracted people from the fact that he showed he was an Animagus. All of the students did, however, ask the same question,

“Who did it?”

Harry was by far the most clueless in this matter. He was far too busy playing to take any notice of the crowds, to see if anyone was jinxing the Snitch, or if anyone had tampered with it beforehand.

Many people suggested that it was Madam Hooch. She had constant access to anything that involved Quidditch, so she could have easily magicked the Snitch. But, there was no motive for her to do that, so, the rumor died almost as quickly as it had begun.

Harry, however, did have a small idea. Maybe it was the person who had been sending him notes all year. Maybe he or she finally acted out on his or her threats. But who was it, and why would they do this? Telling Dumbledore that he had stolen his phoenix should be enough punishment, this was unnecessary.

The only thing that kept Harry happy throughout his time in the hospital wing was the Quidditch Cup. It was sitting right next to him, glittering in the light from the sunset. It gave off a radiance that was only equivalent to Cho's. Even though he was in immense pain, Harry kept reminding himself, "We won."

It had been Dumbledore who had brought the trophy into the room. He got passed Madam Pomfrey's tendency to throw people out only because he was Headmaster.

"Congratulations, Harry," he said when he placed the trophy on the table next to his bed.  
"Congratulations on another great victory for Gryffindor."

"Thanks, Professor," said Harry very weakly. He had just had the Snitch magically pulled out of his hand, and it wasn't the most painless thing in the world, nor was the after feeling of it he was having now.

"And shall I congratulate you now, for a victory tomorrow, in your duel?" asked Dumbledore casually, sitting down at the foot of Harry's bed.

"Oh, Professor, I don't know," said Harry. "With this hand? I don't know if I'll even be able to hold a wand, much less duel." This thought had been bothering Harry for a while. Would he be able to get revenge on Malfoy?

"Harry, let me tell you a secret.... Animagi need never fear that."

"What do you mean?" asked Harry, confused.

"Harry, you've noticed, haven't you? When you transform, you don't change an equal mass into another equal mass. Your wings, for example. They are much larger than your shoulder blades, so where do they get their extra size from?"

"I don't know professor..." said Harry.

"Actually, Harry, no one does. It's just one of those mysteries of magic that will never be revealed. Anyway, Harry, what I'm saying is, someone who loses their entire arm would still be able to transform their stub into the full animal's arm."

“So... what you’re saying is,” said Harry, starting to catch on, “is that I can just transform this mangled hand of mine into the paw of a gryffin, and I can use it as normal? The gryffin’s hand will not be damaged?” Dumbledore gave his trademark eye twinkle, and smiled.

“Exactly,” he said. “Trust me Harry... I know from personal experience.”

“You mean... you’re an Animagus?” asked Harry.

“Yes,” said Dumbledore. He then took out his wand, and pointed to his long, crooked nose. “You see this nose of mine, Harry?”

“Yes, professor,” said Harry, trying not to laugh. It was a very odd sight, seeing an old man touching his nose repeatedly with a long wand.

“Well, people have always wondered why it’s so long, and crooked, and I know there are many theories and rumors, and everyone’s too embarrassed to ask. So, you’ll be the first to know.

“When I was younger, becoming the wizard that I am today, I got into a... fight. I came out of it with an unbreakable spell put on my nose that caused it to turn purple, and bubble and puss for the rest of my life. Luckily, I was an Animagus. I transformed by nose, just enough so that it became the flesh version of a beak. I have kept it that was ever since.”

“I see, professor,” said Harry.

“But, you need not worry, Harry,” said Dumbledore. “By the time the year is over, your hand will have fully healed, you won’t need a paw for the rest of you life.”

“Professor,” began Harry. “I know this may be a... personal question, but... what animal are you?” Dumbledore smiled.

“Oh Harry, I cannot say. There is a reason I don’t announce why my nose is this way. You see, I am an unregistered Animagus.”

This took Harry by surprise. It wasn’t normal to have Dumbledore try and be above the law. Why didn’t he just register?

“Me being an unregistered Animagus gives us a surprise advantage over Voldemort,” said Dumbledore, as if sensing Harry’s question. “Even though it would be terrible beyond belief if it ever came to this, but, if Voldemort and I were forced to fight, I am sorry to say that he would probably win. My only chance to win would be the element of surprise. So please, Harry, don’t tell anyone.”

“Of course not,” said Harry quietly.

Dumbledore sat up from the bed, and looked like he was about to turn out the door, when he turned around. “Speaking of being hurt and all, Harry, Fawkes has been acting very peculiar lately. Been getting sick a lot, not being his usual illustriousness... you wouldn’t happen to know anything about that, would you?”

Harry swallowed hard. Did Dumbledore suspect him of tampering with Fawkes? Did he think that the copy he had was not the real thing?

“No, professor,” said Harry, trying to sound as serious as possible. “Haven’t a clue.” Dumbledore smiled, nodded, and left the room. Harry sighed, collapsed backwards into his pillow, and just hoped that clones didn’t “wear out”.

Harry was awoken the next morning by a violent shake from Ron.

“Get up!” he yelled. Harry rubbed his eyes, and quickly put on his glasses. He saw that Hermione and Cho were with Ron as well.

“Are you coming down to the duel?” asked Hermione.

“Oh, I don’t know if you should,” said Cho. “What with your hand...”

“Don’t worry,” said Harry, grinning, “I’ve got it under control. “He exposed his bandaged hand to them, and transformed it into the gryffin’s paw. He took the bandages off, and surprised everyone with his new hand underneath. Harry flexed his new “fingers”, and gripped his wand in his new hand.

It was a bit awkward at first, holding the wand with three short circles rather than five long fingers, but he got used to it quick. Harry jumped out of bed, and walked down to the Great Hall with the three of them, talking excitedly about the duel.

“I heard that whoever wins gets an extra fifty points for their house,” said Cho.

“Great!” said Ron. “We’re one hundred points higher today, thanks to your win last night Harry, so that means we have-”

“Three-hundred and sixty points,” said Hermione, holding her head high in the air. Ron stuck his tongue at her.

“Yeah, whatever,” said Ron. “And Slytherin has... four-hundred and five points... so if one of us wins-”

“Gryffindor wins the house Cup by five points,” said Hermione. Ron glared at her.

“Win it again?” said Harry when they reached the door to the Great Hall. “For the fifth year in a row? Wow, that’d be cool.” He threw open the doors, and revealed a room packed with students. Not a single seat was empty, everyone wanted to see the duel.

Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Cho walked over to the side of the room, against the wall, awaiting the time for them to show off their dueling abilities. The hall grew quiet just then, as Professor Flitwick walked up to the head of the room. He tapped his throat with his wand, and spoke.

“Hello students and teachers!” he said, his voice magically magnified. “I am happy to present to you... the Dueling Club members, and the Dueling Club captain, Harry Potter!” He presented his arm to the side of the room where Harry, Ron, Hermione and Cho were. Amid the applause, they walked up to the front, soon followed by other members who rose from various parts in the giant room. When everyone was up there, they instinctively took a bow, causing the room to applaud them. Harry couldn’t help but smile.

“Now,” continued Professor Flitwick, “I am very sorry to announce that, due to tests tomorrow, we will have to shorten this dueling session. Only the top six most elite members of this club will duel today, resulting in five magnificent duels. I will now read the six names off. If you are not read off, I am sorry, but please return to your seat. Now, for the names: First and foremost, our captain, Harry Potter!” Harry took a small bow, followed by an applause from the room.

“Next, tied for first place so far in the club: Draco Malfoy!” Malfoy bowed, like Harry, but there wasn’t as much applause for him. He didn’t just win the Quidditch Cup.

“Next: Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, Cho Chang, and... Sy- Syen- Tci!” The four of them took a small bow as the rest of the Dueling Club sat down, back at their seats. After a short applause, it was time for the dueling to begin.

“As we did before,” continued Professor Flitwick, “the matching will be chosen randomly, and will be one on one. I have the six names in this hat, and they will be drawn two at a time. The two drawn will face each other.

“The only different rule this time will be one that we should have used before. I will not countdown for the match to begin. This will be like an official, authentic duel, and each match will begin only by the first spell being used.... Everyone ready?”

The entire Great Hall, filled with every teacher and student in the entire school, yelled, “YES!” Professor Flitwick smiled, and dug his hand into the hat, and moved his hand around, shuffling the names up. He finally grabbed hold of two, and yanked them out of the hat. He smiled, and spoke loudly:

“The first match will be... Mr. Tci against... Mr. Harry Potter!” Everyone in the hall cheered as Hermione, Ron, Cho and Malfoy cleared the front of the room so only Tci, Harry and Professor Flitwick remained. He pointed his wand at the floor, and muttered something. As soon as he did, the floor magically expanded, making the tiny space that they had originally had to duel in almost the size of the original Great Hall.

Professor Flitwick bounced to the back of the new space he created, and signaled for Tci and Harry to move into position. Harry swallowed hard as he walked up to duel Tci. In his last duel with him, Harry had barely won.

Tci got into his regular position, (with many exclamations of excitement from the audience, seeing him do this for the first time) and Harry brandished his wand, ready to go. Harry waited for what felt like an eternity, all eyes upon him and Tci, seeing who would make the first move.

During his many weeks of studying, Harry had read much about dueling. He read that usually the weaker or more egotistical dueler makes the first move, while the wiser and more disciplined dueler makes the second. However, if more than several seconds passed, and no one made a move, the greater dueler was supposed to make the first move.

All the thinking of who should do what and when made Harry's brain start to hurt. He decided to just go for it, and begin the match.

"Expelliarmus!" he yelled, aiming right at Tci. The spell shot out from the tip of his wand, and flew right to Tci. At first, it looked as though the spell was going to hit him. Tci hadn't made any attempt to defend himself, or move out of the way.

Just when Harry thought the duel was going to be over, and the spell was an inch away from Tci's face, he grabbed his Swand from his sheath, and covered his face with it; he moved so fast, he looked as though he stood still. The spell hit the blade of his Swand, and bounced right off of it, sending it flying to the almost infinitely high ceiling.

"Karthiaki Prosvolus!" yelled Tci, fencing his Swand on a direct path towards Harry. A red beam shot out of it. Harry remembered that spell as the Heart Attack curse, and though he didn't feel like experiencing it first hand.

"Kooverta!" yelled Harry, holding onto his wand tight with his small paw. A small, invisible shield popped up right in front of Harry, and the curse hit it, disappearing. Harry jumped up, above the shield, and pointed his wand down at Tci.

"Siragus!" he yelled, transforming his shoulders into his wings, and hovering in the air, right above his shield. His spell hit the ground right next to Tci, causing him to wobble off to the side. He, however, looked unhurt, and jumped into the air.

"Anataga atsuidesu!" he yelled. No beam came out of Tci's wand, though. Harry, however, felt the effects of it anyway. The world around Harry was staring to... melt away. Everything looked as though it were a painting that had water splashed on it. Everything melted together, making Harry's world a black oblivion in which he was hovering in the air. Suddenly, the blackness around Harry burst into flames.

"AAAHHH!" yelled Harry, immediately feeling the flame's searing heat. All the blackness was gone, there was only fire everywhere. The entire world was just one

massive inferno, and Harry was right in the middle of it. The flames seemed to be grabbing for him, trying to devour him. Each time one of their plasmatic tendrils lapped at his skin, Harry felt the hot burning sensation flow all over his body. Harry gritted his teeth, and tried to ignore the white-hot pain all around him, and the fact that he was drowning in his own sweat.

“It’s not real... it’s not real....” he reminded himself. This seemed to give him power again, he tried to remember every happy memory he had ever had... and was going to have. I’m going to live with my mom, I’m going to see her again, he reminded himself. He felt the burn of the fire start to cool down all around him. The more he reminded himself, the more the fire seemed to die down. It was the happiest thing he could think of. Though, he felt as if there was something else giving him hope, something else... that wanted him back. The fire couldn’t take all that happiness. Soon, all the flames were gone, and Harry was back in the black oblivion.

He stood there for a few seconds, looking around at the nothingness, wondering what would happen next, when the blackness exploded back into reality, causing Harry to cover his eyes from the pain of suddenly being exposed to so much light.

When his eyes recovered from the shock, Harry was shocked and amazed at the sight before him. Ron, Hermione and Cho were around Harry, patting him on the back, and Tci was on the floor, with his wand off to the side.

“Wha- what happened?” asked Harry as Tci started waking up.

“You spell, it hit Tci,” said Ron.

“What spell? I didn’t use any spell,” said Harry.

“Oh yes you did,” said Hermione, “the Disarming Spell.”

“But, Tci deflected that.”

“Harry,” said Hermione arrogantly, “don’t you know what the ceilings in this room are made of?”

“Um, no... but I have a feeling you’re going to tell me.”

“They’re made of magical mirrors, to make them easier to enchant,” said Hermione. “Tci deflected your spell up to the top of the room. The spell hit the mirrors up there, and came back down to hit him when he was busy getting ready to put another spell on you.”

“Well, at least I won,” said Harry, walking away from the arena. He would have preferred to have beaten Tci in a different manner, not having one of his old spells luckily hit his opponent while Harry was under his opponent’s curse.

After some applause for Harry being announced winner, Professor Flitwick dug his hand back into the hat, with Tci's name removed. Tci sat back down at the Slytherin table, not looking especially distraught, but not happy either. He had a blank expression on his face, as if the outcome of the duel hadn't affected him at all.

"Everyone ready for duel number two?" smiled Professor Flitwick as he dug his hand back into the hat. He moved his hand around, trying to get as random a match up as possible, while everyone around him was cheering. Finally, he stopped shuffling the names up, and drew two out. He smiled again, and read them off.

"For our next match... Mr. Ron Weasley and Mr. Draco Malfoy will duel!" he said loudly. Harry cheered along with the rest of the room when Ron and Malfoy stepped into the giant blank space in the room. Harry, Cho, and Hermione stepped off to the side, out of the way. Malfoy and Ron both got into position.

"Whenever you're ready duelists," said Professor Flitwick, jumping into the air, and hovering at his highest point. Ron didn't waste a second. He showed his weakness by attacking first.

"Fucillius!" he yelled, shooting the spell right out of the tip of his wand, hitting Malfoy directly on the chest. But, Malfoy didn't even flinch. Ron just gaped at him.

"Wingardium Leviosa!" yelled Malfoy. His spell hit Ron, and sent him flying up into the air. Malfoy then directed him to fly backwards, causing Ron to slam into the wall with a giant 'boom!'. Malfoy brought him forward a little, ready to hit him against the wall again. Things were looking bad for Ron.

"Come on Ron! Let's go!" cheered Harry. Ron turned his head over to his direction and smiled. He pointed his wand at Malfoy just when he was about to send him flying back into the wall again.

"Necro Poli!" yelled Ron. A green skull with a small gassy tail trailing behind it shot forth from his wand, flying right towards Malfoy. The skull hit Malfoy in the arm he was holding his wand with, and passed right through his flesh, like a ghost. The skull disappeared after it passed through Malfoy's skin, but the effects of Ron's spell had just begun. At the place where the skull passed through, Malfoy's arm was beginning to turn a dark green. Malfoy quickly switched the wand from his bad hand to his good one, but Ron had thought of that, and already sent another skull through that arm as well. Now both arms were a dark, muddy green, getting more decrepit by the second.

"Expelli- ah!" yelled Malfoy. When he threw his wand hand forward to give the spell more momentum, his arm flew right off. The lower part of his arm dislocated itself from the other half at the point where Ron's spell had hit. His spell made the skin where it hit old, weak, and practically dead. At the slightest movement, they would fall off, and Malfoy's throw made one of his arms go flying off.

His arm soared through the air like some grotesque bird, landing on the floor between the two of them. There was no blood, however, just some green goo from where the spell hit.

“Give up Malfoy!” yelled Ron, grinning. “If you use another spell, your other arm will just go flying off! You don’t stand a chance.” Harry felt very excited for his friend. Was Ron actually going to win?

“Yeah, go Ron!” he yelled. Malfoy, however, looked untrammelled.

“Well, I still have one more spell left,” he said.

“Go ahead,” said Ron.

“Erhomo Dracono!” yelled Malfoy, causing his other arm to go flying off, along with his arm. It flew through the air, like his other one, and landed near his other arm as well.

Malfoy looked very odd, without any arms. Ron gave a small laugh as he started walking over to the arms, to pick up Malfoy’s wand.

Just when he had about reached the wand, however, there was a rumbling in the Great Hall like a small earthquake. Ron stumbled onto the ground. Suddenly, the wall across from him exploded, and in flew Malfoy’s Hungarian Horntail from his Care of Magical Creatures class, looking more vicious and terrible than ever. Malfoy had trained it to be strong and fast. The dragon was extremely powerful, huge muscles were bulging all over the place. It also wore a large, metal suit of spiked armor that covered its entire back and head making it even more intimidating.

The dragon was also far too large for the room. It had to hold its head all the way down to the floor to fit. It was unable to fly in the small space, but it was still far from immobile. It started quickly crawling its way towards Malfoy.

“Get him, the red-haired one,” grinned Malfoy, nodding his head in the direction of Ron. The dragon shot a look over at him, and blew out a cloud of smoke from its large nostrils. Ron’s eyes grew big as he started walking backwards, away from Malfoy’s wand on the floor, and towards the wall.

“Fo- fo- Fotia Poli!” stuttered Ron, pointing a shaking wand at the dragon. A small beam of water shot out of his wand, hitting the dragon on its tough hide. It had no effect, the dragon continued to walk towards Ron, every second decreasing the time towards Ron’s defeat. Malfoy was laughing his head off, well out of the way of the dragon. Even though it was his, he knew better than to be near it when it was getting ready to attack.

The dragon reared its head back, inhaling deeply. It opened its mouth wide, and a fiery orb started forming right above its mouth. It became more and more visible by the second, glowing a darker and deeper red, then to a light-blue, then to a pure white, showing off just how hot it was. The orb of fire was spinning so fast that pieces of it were

shooting off, flying through the air, until the piece came in contact with a wall, which it burned through, creating a sizzling sound, and a large, deep red burn.

“Prepare to become a fireplace, Weasley!” yelled Malfoy, over the intense sound and wind the orb was giving off. Just as the words left Malfoy’s mouth, the orb left the dragon’s. It banged its head forward, and when its neck was a maximum length, the orb of fire shot right through the air, straight at Ron, who was standing there, speechless.

The orb hit the ground right in front of Ron’s feet, causing a tremendous, fiery explosion. It blew Ron high into the air, all the way up to the ceiling of the Great Hall, and all the way back down again, colliding with the floor. The explosion also caused a massive amount of smoke and fire to appear all around the impact site, making everyone in the entire room cough.

“Anemos!” gagged Malfoy, after he had run up to Ron, and grabbed his wand with his teeth. He was holding it in his mouth.

A heavy wind blew forth from his wand, dissolving the smoke. When it was cleared, Ron lay face-down on the hard floor, his wand still in hand. The dragon was standing tall before him, with his arms crossed, looking quite satisfied with itself. It blew a puff of smoke out from its nostrils, and turned its mouth into what looked like a smile.

Malfoy just skipped over to his arms that were lying on the ground, and made them fly up to meet his stubs. He touched their place of connection with his wand, and they went back to normal.

He then skipped over to Ron, and gently picked the wand out of his hand, with his pinky up. He smiled, and held it high in the air, causing the entire Slytherin table to cheer, and for Harry to feel as though he had just swallowed a bagful of ice cubes. Malfoy had slaughtered Ron... would he be able to defeat him when his time came to face Malfoy?

By now, the cheering had stopped, and Malfoy was assisting Professor Flitwick in the cleanup of the dueling arena. He sent his dragon away, back through the hole it had made in the wall, and then Professor Flitwick quickly patched the hole up with a little charm. He also brought enervated Ron, and Malfoy threw him his wand, looking quite smug. Ron had an expression of disgust on his face as he walked back to the Gryffindor table, not even looking at Harry. The floor was now clear, and it was time for the next duel.

“Alright! Who’s ready for another round? I know I am,” yelped Professor Flitwick, looking utterly ecstatic from the last exciting duel. He reached his hand back into the hat, his tongue hanging slightly out.

Harry sighed, the odds were favoring him facing a friend if he had to duel this time. The only people that were left were Hermione, Cho, Malfoy, and himself. Harry wanted to duel only one of those people. Professor Flitwick seemed satisfied with the two random names he’d chosen, so he brought his hand out of the hat, and threw it behind him.

“Our two new duelers are... Miss. Cho Chang-”

“Not me, not me,” pleaded Harry to himself.

“-and Miss. Hermione Granger!” Harry gave a quick and quiet sigh of relief. Even though Cho and Hermione were on the way to becoming friends, they didn’t have a relationship anything like Harry had with Cho. The both of them walked to the center of the large dueling area, and brandished their wands. Professor Flitwick jumped back and into the air, and the attention of everyone was on Cho and Hermione.

“Should be pretty good, eh Potter?” said Malfoy. He was standing right next to Harry, leaning against the wall, eating popcorn out of a small, colorful bag. Harry just glared at him.

“You’re not mad at me for beating your pathetic friend, are you?” said Malfoy, pooping another piece into his mouth from the bag, smiling. “I mean, if he had actually put up a fight... maybe I’d feel sympathetic towards him, but the way he just stood there, gaping at my dragon, he looked like a fool! If he had even tried another spell, maybe he could’ve beaten it.”

As much as Harry hated Malfoy, he had to admit he was right. Ron did not do very well in the last duel. He apparently did not face danger as well as Harry did. Harry, not wanting to admit this, decided to change the subject.

“Where’d you get that?” asked Harry, pointing to Malfoy’s bag.

“Oh this?” said Malfoy, pointing to his popcorn. “I just conjured it up. Muggles eat it at fun events, and this is certainly a fun event... the two girls of Harry Potter, one against the other, who is more worthy of the legend? Want some?”

Harry decided to stop talking to Malfoy, and now turned his attention to the duel, which hadn’t started yet. Both Cho and Hermione were still standing like statues, looking at each other, waiting for the other to make her first move. Finally, Hermione started.

“Kano Micro!” she yelled.

“Egoestesi!” yelled Cho, less than half a second later, pointing her wand at herself. She glowed a bright yellow for an instant, and then Hermione’s spell hit her, but it didn’t have any effect. Cho still stood there, the exact size that she normally was. Hermione, however, was a different story. She was suddenly starting to shrink down to the size of a football. But, from what Harry could see, she still looked determined. She pointed her wand at herself.

“Engorgio!” she squeaked. Just as the spell was about to pop out, Cho yelled,

“Esiestego!” There was a bright yellow flash, and Hermione’s spell had hit her, but it was having no effect, again. Cho was taking the power of her spell, and she was growing five times her normal size. Hermione was starting to look a little intimidated now, since she was about one-millionth the size of Cho.

“Siragus!” roared Cho. There was a giant explosion, right under Hermione, that made her fly through the air, and right at Cho. Cho grabbed her, and picked the tiny wand out of her hand.

“Miss. Chang is the winner!” squealed Professor Flitwick. “Excellent use of the Limited Spells, the Backfire and Forefire spells, excellent job!”

Cho smiled, and set Hermione down on the ground. She handed her back her wand, and increased her size so that she was her normal dimensions again. Cho then did the same to herself, and walked across the arena, back next to Harry. Hermione, looking untrammelled, walked back to her seat, and sat down next to Ron.

“What are the Limited Curses, Cho?” asked Harry.

“They’re the spells I used. The Backfire Spell takes a spell that your opponent uses on you, and uses it on him or her. The Forefire spell takes a spell that your opponent uses on his or herself, and uses it on you.”

“Why are they limited?”

“You can only use them once in a while, they are extremely complex spells, and your wand needs to regenerate after their use.”

“Oh, I see.”

“No offense, Harry,” whispered Cho, “but your friend, Hermione, is way too predictable.”

“What do you mean?” asked Harry.

“She did everything by the book. I knew that she wouldn’t go first in the duel, so all I had to do was wait for the time to expire, and then she’d go. I also knew that her first spell was going to be something that disabled me, and her second spell was going to be something that would help her. So, all I had to do was get ready to use the Limited Spells, and I knew I could easily beat her.”

Harry smiled, that was Hermione, always looking to books for the answer, and then doing exactly as they said.

“For our next match,” said Professor Flitwick, just taking his hand out of the hat he had been shuffling the names in, “Mr. Draco Malfoy, and Miss. Cho Chang will duel!”

“Again?” gasped Cho as she walked out for her next match. Even though the last duel hadn’t taken much physical activity, it did take a lot of thinking, and Cho was wiped out. Malfoy, however, looked very rested from his last match as he made the bag of popcorn disappear, and wiped his greasy hands on his robe. He walked out to the stadium floor, grinning.

Again, Harry thought as the two of them brandished their wands, he didn’t know who to cheer for. If Cho won, he’d have to face her, so he didn’t want that. But, he also didn’t want to cheer for Malfoy. He decided just to keep quiet.

The two of them stood there for less than second, when Malfoy began the duel.

“Anataga totemopiku!” he yelled. Harry immediately over at Cho, to see its effect. Before she had a chance to react to Malfoy’s spell, she began to shake all over. She looked as though she was having a convulsion as she trembled, looking like a human earthquake. Her eyes rolled back into her head, and she started to foam at the mouth. She collapsed to the ground, practically drowning in her own drool as she shook even more fiercely.

Malfoy only laughed when her wand came rolling off of her fingers, and right onto the ground next to her. He walked right over to her, doing a few spins and whistling. He kicked the wand into the air, and grabbed it right out of the air. He took a sickening bow, with Cho still behind him, and all of Slytherin House cheered for him.

“Thank you, thank you!” he said sarcastically as he blew kisses to the audience. He walked back next to Harry, dropping Cho’s wand on her as he walked by her, and he left Cho lying there on the floor, quivering in a large puddle of drool. Professor Flitwick quickly came over and performed the counter curse on Cho. She immediately stood up, looking as if nothing had happened, and ran back to her seat in the Ravenclaw table, where she suddenly started crying into her arms.

Harry wanted more than anything to run over there, and try to comfort her, but he knew he had to first confront Malfoy. He clenched his fists as he glared at Malfoy, who was standing right next to him. He gave Malfoy a sickening look, and Malfoy just battered his eyes at him, trying to be funny.

“Not my fault if your girlfriend’s pathetic,” he said shrugging.

“Wait until the duel, wait until the duel...” Harry told himself, going against every nerve in his body to kill Malfoy, right then and there.

“Well, since there are only two duelists left, they might as well come on up here and get ready!” squeaked Professor Flitwick. Malfoy and Harry glared at each other, and walked up, side by side. Malfoy spun around when they reached the center of the arena, and faced Harry. He smiled.

“Well, he were go ladies and gentlemen,” said Professor Flitwick over the excitement in the crowd, “the two best duelists we have in this club... both only defeated once... who will be crowned as the best?”

The Great Hall erupted into cheers of “Harry” and “Draco”, but Harry could barely hear them. All he was concentrating on was Malfoy. This duel was about more than revenge, or trying to be the best, it was now about defending the honor of his friends... Harry had to win...

Malfoy made the first move.

“Expelliarmus!” he yelled. Harry just shuffled to the side, avoiding the beam.

“Ekathormirio Oplo!” yelled Harry. The hall shook as hundreds of small, metallic balls flew out of his wand, all straight at Malfoy.

“Fteros!” yelled Malfoy, just before the balls hit him, pointing his wand at himself. He immediately sprouted some wings out from his back, and shot into the air like a bullet, avoiding all the balls which crashed into the wall, and disappeared. Taking the duel to the air, Harry transformed his shoulders into wings, and flew up as well, even faster than Malfoy did, and with more precision. The wings were a part of him, not a magical attachment, and he could utilize them better.

“Ki Poli!” yelled Malfoy, firing his wand like a gun. Harry didn’t recognize this spell, but saw it coming at him. It was a fiery purple cloud, and it was moving rather slow, or slow for a spell. Harry easily dodged it. But then, just as he dodged it, he felt a pain in his chest, as though it had just been hit by a flaming cement truck, going two hundred miles per hour. It blew him backwards, making Harry hit the wall behind him, and creating a large hole in it.

“That was the Sprit Bird Spell, Potter,” said Malfoy. Harry could barely hear him, the force of the impact from the spell and the wall had wiped him and his senses out. “It projects a false image of the spell, with the real spell behind it. The real spell, of course, is invisible, so no one ever sees it coming.”

He walked up right in front of Harry, who was now slouched against the wall.

“Give up,” said Malfoy.

“Never,” said Harry, feeling renewed strength. He rolled over to the side, away from Malfoy, and then shot back up into the sky. Malfoy followed him, not far behind.

“Oplo! Oplo! Oplo!” yelled Harry, blindly shooting spells behind him, trying to hit Malfoy who was tracking him. He heard Malfoy give a yelp, and knew that one of his spells had hit him. Harry turned around, and saw him on the ground, rubbing his head. He

looked up at Harry, and touched his wings with his wand to make them go away. Harry flew down to the ground, and transformed his wings back into his shoulders.

“You know what, Potter,” said Malfoy, folding his arms, “I’m getting tired of fighting you myself. I think it’s time to enlist the help of a… friend.” he rose his wand into the air, and Harry realized that he was about to call for his dragon. He had to do something fast.

“Expelliarmus!” yelled Harry, aiming right for the wand that Malfoy was holding high in the air. The Disarming Spell hit it, and it flew right out of Malfoy’s hand.

“Accio Wand!” Harry said quickly, and excitedly. He had practically won the duel. Malfoy’s wand came flying right towards him, and he caught it in his left hand. He shook the wand at the now shocked Malfoy.

“Ha! Take that Malfoy! The duel is over, and I win!” yelled Harry happily. Malfoy, however, was looking quite unhurt. He folded his arms again.

“No, Potter. I think this duel had just begun.”

“What do you mean?” asked Harry. “I have your wand!” Malfoy smiled.

“For this,” he said, “I do not require a wand…” he closed his eyes, and tilted his head up to the ceiling, and Harry felt faint again. Malfoy was transforming, right before his eyes. It took less than a second for Malfoy to fully transform into his beast, and when he was done, Harry dropped his wands out of his hands, and they fell to the floor, covered in sweat. Harry fell to his knees, and gaped, wide-eyed at the abomination that lay before him.

There was only one was to describe Malfoy’s animal: lethal. It was twice the width of a Hungarian Horntail, and at least three times as tall, though the room appeared as though it was somehow making itself grow larger to be able to contain it. The thing had three heads: the one in the middle was some sort of serpent with spikes coming out all over its face, and having at least twenty eyes. The heads on either side of that one were both giant basilisks, their red eyes blazing the room. The three heads lead down to the giant body that looked like a dragon’s, only it had six arms: three on either side. All six of them were just as deadly as the heads, and looked just as painful. Each hand had seven fingers, and they looked more like long, thick needles than digits. The legs were large and muscular as well, and had three sharp toes at the base. The monstrosity also had a long tail, that looked like a snake, only with a giant flame at the end instead of a head.

The beast spread its massive flaming wings, which looked like infernos, and then gave a loud, ear-piercing, deafening shriek that rang throughout the entire hall, causing everyone to cover their ears. The beast glared down at Harry, and gave a smile one all three heads.

“Like it, Potter?” came a voice in Harry’s head. It felt as though he was thinking in his head, only someone else was doing it for him. “Yeah, it’s me, Draco. I just wanted you to see what I have become, how impressive and awesome I really am, before I crush you.”

“How are you talking to me?” said Harry in his head. His forehead was hurting slightly... but why? Voldemort wasn’t anywhere near here.

Draco laughed.

“Potter, didn’t McGonagall teach you anything? All Animagi are connected, its like we’re all in our own world, separated from the rest. It’s a bond that we must all share, even if those we share it with are... inferior, may I say?”

“So what animal are you?” thought Harry.

“Can’t you tell?” said Malfoy. “I am a mixture of five beasts: Dragon head, body, tail and arms; two Basilisk heads; a Hentai head; a Atsuai tail; and phoenix wings. I am the greatest of all animals, the best from the best.”

“So that is what you’ve wasted all that time trying to become? Some sort of weird freak show? Your basilisks aren’t even petrifying anyone!” said Harry when he picked his and Malfoy’s wands up from the floor, trying to throw Malfoy off.

“Ha! The only reason I’m not petrifying people left and right is because McGonagall made me lower the basilisk’s eye power when around people. And a waste of time? Is that what you think this is? Let me show you the power of this ‘freak’!” yelled Malfoy in Harry’s head.

The beast put all of its hands together, forming a large circle. It then let out a loud scream, and separated them, spreading them as far apart as possible. Connecting all of the hands was what looked like a light green energy sheet. It looked almost liquid. The beast let out another noise, and a huge beam of light, the same dimensions as the energy sheet connecting the hands shot out of it. It flew right at Harry, causing a tremendous explosion. Fire exploded all around him, and Harry was so engulfed in the flames, he wasn’t even blown away.

“AAAHHH!” yelled Harry. He had to try and keep his cool though... “Aqua Nero!” A large cloud popped out of his wand, and flew right above his head, letting down gallons upon gallons of rain in seconds. The fire around him was soon put out. Harry then turned his attention to Malfoy.

“Stupefy!” he yelled, aiming right at the monster. His spell shot out of his wand, and hit the beast, right in the stomach, but it bounced right back off like a mirror.

“Ha ha ha!” yelled Malfoy in Harry’s head. “Don’t you know that phoenixes and Hentai are both almost invincible to spells? With both of their greatness combined, I am invincible to all spells! Even the Killing Curse wouldn’t affect me!”

Harry swallowed hard as Malfoy reared all three of his heads back, getting ready to strike again. What could he do? All spells were useless... all he could do was stall until he thought of something.

The three heads shot forward. The Hentai head in the middle spun its spikes around, giving off some sort of massive electrical attack, and the Basilisks shot a mini inferno from their mouths, able to do that by the Atsuai in them. The three blasts all came close of hitting Harry, and each created more explosions and holes all over. More and more fire was appearing. All that Harry could do was look up at that scaly head, and hope whatever it was going to do wouldn’t hurt too much....

Then it hit him. Scaly skin! The beast that Malfoy was, was made up of almost all reptiles, everything except for the phoenix wings. A reptile that large would need a lot of heat to stay warm, since they’re all cold blooded, and Harry guessed that was the job for the massive flame on its tail. All Harry had to do was lower the temperature enough to render the monster frozen. Cho had taught him that spell a long time ago.

“Apendo Keros!” yelled Harry, as loud as he could, emphasizing every syllable. He pointed his wand down, indicating that he wanted the temperature in the area to go down.

The effect of the spell was immediate. Harry grew goose bumps the second he cast the magic, and felt his skin go clammy and blue. He could see his breath in the air. From the top of the room, snow was beginning to fall.

Malfoy was feeling the spell as well. When Harry cast the spell, it was getting ready to shoot another round of fire and electricity from its mouths. Now its heads were stopped in their spots, leaned over Malfoy’s back. The three heads were coughing, and Harry could see the icy breath come out. The color of the beast was going from a dark red, to a light blue and green. The fire on its tail went out, and it gave a loud scream.

“What have you done!?” yelled Malfoy in Harry’s head, as he collapsed to the ground, creating a mini earthquake.

“Beaten you Malfoy, that’s what I did,” responded Harry. The beast gave one last yelp, this time very weak. Then, the monster started growing smaller. The three heads fused together to form one, and then shrank down to normal size. Four of the six arms disappeared into its sides, and its legs shrank back to normal. Finally, Malfoy was left there, in the middle of the arena, shivering like crazy under a small pile of snow. Harry couldn’t help but smile.

“Harry Potter is the winner!” yelled Professor Flitwick, changing the temperature of the room back to normal. Everyone cheered loudly for Harry. Some of his fellow Gryffindors

came up, and put him on their shoulders, chanting, “Harry! Harry!” as they walked around the room, holding him up.

Professor Dumbledore, whom Harry had just noticed was off into the corner of the room, and had watched the entire duel, set off a series of small fireworks and banners, balloons and glitter. Harry felt as though he had just won the Quidditch Cup again.

Harry looked behind him, and saw Crabbe, Goyle, and Ginny next to Malfoy, who was still lying on the floor. Crabbe and Goyle helped him up, but he threw them off, and he fell onto Ginny, who helped him walk out of the room, away from Harry’s throng of supporters.

“Just another day in the life of Harry Potter, eh?” said Ron, who was in the midst of the people surrounding Harry. Harry smiled at him.

“Win the Quidditch Cup one day, win a dueling tournament after that… what’s next? Get sixteen O.W.L.s?” Just then, it hit Harry. He jumped off the hands of his supporters when they were halfway back to the Gryffindor common room.

“Oh no!” he said to the shocked group. “The O.W.L.s are tomorrow! I’ve got to study!”

Harry, Ron and Hermione ran off to library with a few other fifth-years who had been caught up in the excitement as well. There, they read every book they could get their hands on, not really caring what it was about, and mentioning Harry’s victory every now and then, saying how great he did. They memorized every date, detail, and description they could, until each person collapsed into a book.

Harry fell asleep in the pages of Every Countercurse There Is: And More! at around four in the morning. He was awoken by Hermione’s violent and excited shakings, and ran off to his first period class, grabbing a piece of toast from the Great Hall. He arrived to the classroom with Ron and Hermione right behind him, ready to begin taking their tests.

## **Chapter 26- The O.W.L.s**

Harry sat there at his desk, quill and ink out, ready to go. He looked around to see the rest of his class, and saw everyone was either sitting there quiet, or doing some sort of nervous habits. Ron was biting his fingertips, Hermione was twirling her hair, and Harry just realized that he was batting a quill against his desk.

His first test would be in History of Magic. Harry had heard, from the older students, that this test was by far the most dull and boring, which was expected, since it was their most monotonous class. Harry swallowed hard when Professor Binns entered the room through his chalkboard, many papers in hand.

“I have here your History of Magic O.W.L.s,” groaned Professor Binns as he passed out the tests. “It is a written exam. When you finish, bring it up to me, and if you want, you will be given the Advanced O.W.L. prompt. You may begin.”

Everyone in the class flipped the thick test over and grumbled. The entire examination was short answer and essays. No multiple choice, no true or false, no fill in the blank. All long, boring answers. Harry paced his way through it, not skipping anything. If he didn’t know the answer, he just made something up, wanting it to be over as soon as possible.

An hour and a half later, Harry finished the test. He was exhausted. He almost collapsed onto his desk when he wrote the last letter to the last answer. Wanting to never see the test again for the rest of his life, Harry got up as quickly as he could, and handed it to Professor Binns.

“Thank you, Mr. Potter,” he said. “Do you want the Advanced O.W.L prompt?” Harry groaned quite loudly. While he wanted to do as well as possible, he also didn’t want to think about history for the rest of his life. There was a battle going on in Harry’s mind and, rather unfortunately, the success in school side won.

“Sure, I’ll take it,” moaned Harry. Professor Binns took out a small piece of paper, and handed it to him. Harry walked back to his seat, and read it to himself.

“Choose a moment in history, and reenact it with one other person. You will be graded on accuracy and amount and quality of information given. The top two groups or individuals with the highest grade will get the Advanced O.W.L.”

Harry looked around, seeing who he could work with. Harry saw that Ron had just gone up to pass his test in, so when he came back to his seat, Harry grabbed his arm.

“You want to work together on this?” Harry asked him. Ron shrugged.

“Sure, why not?” Ron pulled his desk over to Harry.

“What event should we do?”

“Well, we could always do the night You-Know-Who was destroyed,” said Ron, quite loudly. “We even have one of the people that was there, a guaranteed A plus!” Harry glared at him.

“No.”

“Well, it was a significant point in time...”

“Come on Ron, we only have twenty-five minutes!”

“Fine, fine, fine! How about... when Hogwarts was decided to be built? We’ve gotten enough details from that about Professor Binns, we could do a perfect job.”

“Okay... but I’m Godric Gryffindor,” said Harry.

“As long as I’m not Slytherin....” said Ron.

They rehearsed their reenactment for the next fifteen minutes, and when the time came to present, Harry saw that three groups were trying for the O.W.L.: he and Ron, Parvati and Lavender, and Hermione by herself. One of the groups would not get it.

“Miss. Granger, you are up first,” said Professor Binns. Hermione gracefully walked up to the front of the class, and reenacted the Speech of 1945: the speech that Dumbledore gave the day before he and his army of wizards attacked Grindelwald’s fortress. She did a flawless job, and emoted perfectly. Everyone, including Professor Binns applauded for her as she skipped back to her seat, the O.W.L. practically hers.

Harry and Ron were next, and their presentation was pathetic compared to Hermione’s. Harry and Ron kept switching back and forth from being Godric Gryffindor to Salazar Slytherin and Rowena Ravenclaw to Helga Hufflepuff at awkward times. Ron kept missing key lines, and Harry tripped over his wand twice, while spinning around to show his transformation between his two people. By the time they were done, half the class was asleep, and those who were awake said nothing. Even Professor Binns looked more gloomy than usual.

“Well, let’s just hope Parvati and Lavender do a worse job than us,” said Ron to Harry when they sat back down to their seats.

“Misses Patil and Brown, your turn,” yawned Professor Binns. Both of the girls walked up to the head of the class, grinning widely. Parvati was holding a cloth in her hand that looked like a wrapped baby, and Lavender was wearing a monster’s mask. Parvati clutched the cloths tightly to her head, and Lavender brandished her wand.

“Give me the boy!” she yelled, in as deep of a voice that she could. It gave the intonation of something very evil.

“No! You’ll never get Harry!” squealed Parvati.

Harry went red, and put his head into his arms. The entire class was now looking at him, because he was the topic of their reenactment. They must have overheard his and Ron’s conversation over what topic to do, and decided to take their rejected idea.

Even though they did a good job in their presentation, it was still one of the most embarrassing moments in Harry’s life. They acted out every detail, just as Harry had seen it in his dream. They went all the way up to the part when Voldemort’s curse deflected back on him, and to demonstrate that, Lavender pointed her wand at herself, and teleported outside the classroom. Everyone clapped when she came back in, and then the bell rang, signaling the end of class.

“Good luck on your next test!” said Professor Binns, looking more cheerful than Harry had ever seen him.

“That test was surprisingly easy,” said Hermione, as they walked to the Transfiguration classroom, for their next test. “I could have skipped reading several books that I glanced at.”

“Yeah, whatever, Hermione,” said Harry, who didn’t think the test was nearly that easy. “At least we’ll all probably get Advanced Transfiguration O.W.L.s since we’re Animagi.”

They reached the Transfiguration class, just as the Slytherins were leaving it. Harry sighed as Malfoy passed him by, anticipating some sort of insult. But, Malfoy just walked right by him, not saying or doing anything. He was probably still sore about his two losses in a row, and wasn’t in the mood to traumatize Harry.

Harry shrugged, walked in the room, and took his seat. The rest of the class soon filed in, and Professor McGonagall rose from her desk, and spoke,

“Hello students, having fun so far?” she said, smiling. Everyone groaned. “Well, only six more to go! Think of it that way, and it doesn’t seem so bad....” She started passing out the written tests to everyone. Harry was relieved that this test wasn’t nearly as long as his History of Magic exam, and it had some easier questions too. Harry breezed through the test, having read an entire book on Transfiguration the previous night. He had also heard Professor McGonagall talk so much about her other classes and such during his Animagus classes that he probably knew more about the subject than most Seventh Year students.

The last question was by far the easiest: “If you were an Animagus, what animal would you be and why?” Harry just wrote that he would be a gryffin, because he is an Animagus, and that is his animal. Duh. He skipped up to the front of the room, and gave his paper to Professor McGonagall.

“Thank you Mr. Potter.”

“Do I get to start on my Advanced O.W.L. yet?” asked Harry.

“No, not yet,” said Professor McGonagall. “Once everyone has finished the exam, we will begin.”

“Alright, professor,” said Harry as he walked back to his seat. He didn’t wait too much longer, Neville was the last person to pass his test in, and that was only about fifteen minutes later. Professor McGonagall shuffled all of her papers together, and put them away into her desk drawer. She waved her wand, and a giant, blue box appeared. It looked like a large, square shed.

“For your Advanced O.W.L.” she said, “you will enter this room, and perform the task I tell you. Afterwards, you will exit the room, and NOT TELL ANYONE WHAT THE TEST WAS! Anyone who gives away what the answers are will get ZERO O.W.L.s, and be expelled from this school for the rest of their life!”

Everyone swallowed hard, she wasn’t usually this strict. But, the O.W.L.s were major business, and she didn’t want anyone not to take them seriously.

“If you want to try your luck at this test, line up in front of this room, and wait until I call your name.”

Harry stepped forward, right in front of the small, conjured box. Hermione and Ron came over as well, along with most of the class. Only Seamus and Dean chose not to participate, everyone else wanted to try. Professor McGonagall walked into the room she made, through some invisible door.

“Ron Weasley! You’re up!” she yelled from inside the room. Ron walked through the invisible door and disappeared. Everyone immediately started talking about what the test could be.

“I’ll bet you have to turn a needle into a buffalo!” yelled Neville.

“Maybe you have to become an Animagus in ten minutes!” said Parvati.

“Yeah right,” said Harry. “It took me months to become one, there’s no way someone could do it in ten minutes.”

“Let’s see you transform!” squealed Lavender. Suddenly, the entire room became focused on Harry, all chanting for him to morph. Harry glanced at Hermione, waiting for her approval. She knew more about what he should and shouldn’t do as an Animagus than he ever would.

“Go for it,” she said, smiling. Harry stared at his crowd of admirers, and focused his mind on the gryffin. He closed his eyes, and thought about its skin color, its shape, every delicate detail on its body. When he opened them up again, he was several feet shorter, looking up at the group of people through the eyes of a gryffin.

Everyone gave sounds of amazement, some ‘oohs’ and ‘aahs’. Parvati and Lavender starting petting and stroking Harry’s mane and fur. Harry made a purring noise which just encouraged them to do more. It was an experience like he felt at the theater with Cho, pure happiness and pleasure.

Just as Harry was beginning to really enjoy the scratching and smoothing sensation, Ron popped out from the room, and all attention turned to him.

“What was it?”

“Was it hard?”

“Did you have to make a buffalo?”

To all these questions, Ron have the same answer:

“I can’t tell you....” Everyone sighed, and the next person was called in.

“Lavender Brown!” Lavender confidently walked into the room, and disappeared. This time, the entire room was quiet, as if trying to hear what was going on inside. Ron was off to the side of the room, trying to resist any temptation to tell anyone what the test was. Within no time, however, Lavender popped out of the room with a happy expression on her face.

“That was much easier than I thought it was going to be,” she said gleefully as she walked over to Harry, whom she was disappointed to see was back in his human form.

“Hermione Granger!”

She walked into the chamber, and returned from it, what felt like seconds later. Harry saw Hermione mumble something like, “Too easy”, when she walked out, and joined Ron in the corner.

“Parvati Patil!”

Parvati entered, and left in no time. It was the same with Neville who went next. He seemed very confident in himself, and looked rather happy when he exited, quite the opposite of what Harry had thought his expression was going to be.

“Harry Potter!” said Professor McGonagall. Harry walked into the room, through the wall. It was just like walking through Platform 9 ¾, or the door at the theater in

Hogsmeade. It was a little cold, and felt like liquid, but that sensation was gone when he was fully inside.

It was a large, dark room. It appeared quite larger on the inside than it had looked from the outside, something quite common in the wizarding world. Professor McGonagall was in the middle of the room, standing behind a table with the three large boxes on it. Before each box was a different object. Harry walked closer to her.

“Welcome, Mr. Potter,” she said. “To get the Advanced O.W.L., all you have to do is beat the creatures under these three boxes. When I lift the box up, whatever is under it will wait for a few seconds, than attack the object before the box. It is up to you to transfigure the object into something that can defeat whatever is under the box. Each time, you will be given less time to figure out what to transform your object into. This exercise will test not only your transfiguration ability, but also your skill to think quick and accurately. If you succeed in defeating all three creatures, than you get the O.W.L. Ready?”

“Yes, professor,” said Harry, wand out.

“By the way,” whispered Professor McGonagall, her hands on the sides of the first box, “you, Weasley, and Granger will each be getting the Advanced O.W.L. anyway. Becoming an Animagus requires more skill than many adult wizards have, and you deserve some reward. And by the way... good job beating Malfoy the other day. He told me he was going to do that, and I really expected him to beat you.”

“Thanks, professor,” said Harry, grinning.

“Ready... set... go!” yelled Professor McGonagall. She lifted the box up quickly, and revealed what was underneath it. It was a fly. Only, it was about fifty times larger than a normal sized fly, around the dimensions of a hamster.

Harry looked down at the object he had to transfigure. It was a worm. Since it was already alive, it didn’t require much skill to transfigure. Harry just pointed his wand at it, and it immediately turned into a massive, green frog. The frog lapped out its giant tongue, and sucked in the fly, crunching it down its throat before it had a chance to make a move.

“Excellent job! Next!” said Professor McGonagall as she threw the box over the next creature. It was revealed to be a snake. It sprang up and hissed at the object Harry had to transfigure: a piece of parchment. Harry took out his wand, and pointed it right at the sheet of paper. He concentrated on what it would become, and suddenly it morphed into a small dragon. It was black all over, and about the size of basketball. It gave a high-pitched roar, and a burst of flames shot from its mouth, incinerating the snake.

“Great work! Last one!” said Professor McGonagall as the next box went flying into the air. It turned out to be a small Hentai, a creature that had been part of Malfoy’s beast. It looked like a snake, only it was thicker, shorter, and on fire all over. It also had millions

of assorted spikes, where its head should be. Distributed between various spikes were hundreds of small eyes. It made its spikes spin like small drills, and glared at the thing Harry had to transform. It was a needle.

Harry once again pointed his wand, and concentrated on what his needle should be. This time, however, he was too late. The Hentai had already started devouring the needle, and it was halfway into its mouth. The Hentai swallowed it when the needle began to transform. The Hentai started to grow and bulge in all directions as once. It gave a loud shriek, and then it exploded into a bloody puddle. Where it used to be, there was now a large bowling ball.

“Excellent work Harry!” said Professor McGonagall. “Great job, best of anyone so far... except maybe Miss. Granger....”

Harry grinned, and walked out of the room, returning to the rest of his classmates. He was soon followed by Professor McGonagall who tapped the room with her wand, making it disappear. She glanced at her watch.

“Well, you still have five minutes until your next test, so I’ll give you all a little break.”

Their five minute break felt more like ten seconds. The bell rang loudly throughout the entire school, echoing throughout the halls and Harry’s body, as if it were a signal telling him it was time to step up to the guillotine. He grabbed his books, and caught up with Hermione and Ron, heading to their next exam.

“So far the tests have been nothing short of preschool-grade!” said Hermione. “I could have grabbed any random child from a Muggle daycare, and he could have passed these tests!” Ron and Harry groaned.

“Oh come on Hermione!” they said. “They’re not that easy!”

“Yeah, I failed the Advanced Transfiguration test,” said Ron.

“Well, at least you’re getting it anyway,” said Harry.

“That’s what I feel bad about,” said Ron. “I failed, and yet I’m still getting the O.W.L. Is that fair?”

“Of course it is,” said Hermione. “You put a lot of time and effort into becoming an Animagus, you deserve something for it.”

“Yeah, I guess so...” said Ron, trailing off, looking longingly at the Great Hall, that was filled with the sights and smells of lunch.

“Come on,” said Hermione, pushing Ron along, “you’ll get plenty of food when the tests are over.”

“Yeah, but that’s not until midnight!” whined Ron. Hermione rolled her eyes, and they soon arrived at the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. They opened the door, and stepped in, taking their seats immediately, wanting to get the test over with as soon as possible.

Harry noticed that the three of them were the first to arrive. No one else, including Mrs. Figg, was there. It was a while before everyone else entered, holding assortments of food and drinks from the Great Hall. Ron looked at Hermione with a ‘why didn’t we do that’ kind of expression, but she just kept staring straight ahead, trying to ignore any distractions.

“Take your seats students,” said Mrs. Figg, taking the last few bits of a rather large sandwich. “I will pass out your tests in one minute.” She walked over to her desk, opened her drawer, and pulled out a large stack of papers. Once everyone was seated, she passed them out. When everyone had one, she said they could begin.

Harry, who was used to the drill by now, breezed through the test. It was easiest one so far, mostly multiple choice, with only a few long answer questions. He was one of the first to pass it in. He asked her about the Advanced O.W.L., and she said she would announce it when everyone was finished.

Once again, Neville was the last person to pass it in. Though, by the way he walked and moved and put the paper up, Harry suspected that he wasn’t last due to lack of skill, it was just because he wanted to take as long as possible to make sure his paper was perfect.

“The Advanced O.W.L. will test your ability to do one of the most important skills we have learned all this year,” said Mrs. Figg. “It will test your ability to resist pain. Those of you who wish to participate will come up before me. Every second, the pain will increase. When you are unable to take anymore, or if I see that it is unsafe that you continue, you sit down. The last three standing will get the Advanced O.W.L. Understand everyone?”

Everyone nodded, and got up before her. This was the first time everyone participated in the Advanced O.W.L., and Harry was glad to see that Neville was trying his hardest and doing well. Maybe he’d get a few O.W.L.s.

Once everyone was lined up in front of her, Mrs. Figg took out her wand and pointed it at them.

“Minnaga itaidesu!” she yelled. A green cloud popped out of her wand, and spread to everyone. It engulfed Harry and he could feel it taking control of his body, telling him what to think, what to do... and what to feel.

At first, it wasn’t bad at all. Harry felt a tickling sensation mostly, all over his body. Then, around ten seconds later, it started to hurt. It felt as though someone with sharp nails was tickling him. The nails felt as though they were getting longer and sharper by

the second. Then the tickling went away all together. It felt like the nails were being dug into his skin, only they weren't fingernails, they were old, rusty, metallic, Muggle nails.

"Yeeowch!" yelled Seamus throwing his hands into the air. The green cloud around him disappeared. Harry looked over, with clenched teeth, and saw that Seamus was walking back to his seat. His try at the O.W.L. was over.

The pain was getting even worse. What had felt like nails now gave the sensation of knives, slowing moving their way into Harry's flesh, piercing the skin, and wiggling around, excruciatingly slow. However, the pain wasn't getting to Harry yet. He concentrated on every happy memory that he had ever had: his date with Cho, Parvati and Lavender petting him, and the thought that he would be reunited with his mom soon. All the pain seemed to flow right out of him.

Harry vaguely heard Parvati and Lavender scream from the pain, but it was a far away sound, like they were a mile away, and between them there was a lot of other static. Harry heard them walk back to their desks as he continued to smile and feel perfectly okay, even though everyone else was feeling flaming knives cutting their way into their skin.

The world around Harry was fading away. It was as if someone was making the entire world around him lighter, more gray, and he was staying the same. In fact, a distinct aura started to develop around Harry. He was glowing like a multicolored light, in a black and white world. All discomfort was gone, and Harry couldn't even remember what pain felt like.

As Harry became enveloped in the heavenly bliss, he vaguely heard Seamus... then Dean... then Neville... then Ron fall to the floor. Harry turned his head, as if in slow motion, over to him. He saw Ron wriggling on the floor, looking like Cho had when Malfoy had used the Unblockable Spasm curse on her. Mrs. Figg ran over to him, and tapped him with her wand several times. He went back to normal, but none of that seemed to matter to Harry anymore.

He saw Hermione finally give into the pain spell, and she collapsed to the ground as everyone else had. Harry started wondering what kind of pain he was supposed to be feeling. As he was thinking, Harry felt the sensation of walking backwards, even though he was standing still. The room seemed to be getting smaller, and Harry appeared to be getting farther away from it.

The room shrunk and sped away faster and faster, until it was the size of a marble, and looked like it was a mile away. Then, it just disappeared. Harry looked around, and saw, all around him, nothing but a white oblivion. There was no sign of the classroom, of Hogwarts anywhere. He felt as though he was being watched, though, and Harry thought he could hear quiet whispers all around him.

Harry squinted his eyes, to see if he could see anyone. He didn't see someone, but he did seem something. It looked as though it was a small puddle, only it was hovering above the ground, and it was moving towards him, flowing and changing shape as it did so.

As it moved closer, Harry thought he saw it begin to change shape. The liquid appeared to be hardening, like liquid cement becoming stiff. The hovering blob also started to grow limbs: two stubby arms and legs, and a small round head. The closer it got to Harry, the more and more human it looked. Fingers and toes started taking shape, and what looked like hair was growing out of the scalp of the head. Harry also saw eyes, lips, a nose, mouth and ears pop out of the head.

The figure was morphing even faster now. The colorless blob was now a light peach, and the hair was turning very red, like Ron's. The arms grew elbows, and the legs grew knees, and then Harry saw the eyes take a color. They became a green... just like his. Once the figure was but a foot away from Harry, it looked perfectly human, and Harry recognized who it was.

"Mom..." said Harry, with a dazed look. The person before him looked exactly like he had seen her in the pictures. The only difference between what was before him now, and what he had seen was this one seemed to have something more to it... something alive, electric almost... a soul. Harry's mom put her arm on his shoulder.

"Harry..." she said, trailing off. It was the most beautiful voice Harry had ever heard. It flowed through him, all throughout his entire body. It made every cell in his body feel alive, as they had never felt before.

Full of immeasurable joy, Harry threw his arms up to his mother. Just when his fingers were about to touch her, he felt as though he had been caught by a fishing rod around his navel. He stopped right in midair, as if frozen.

"Harry..." said his mother again. There was another tug at Harry, and he felt himself being yanked back, at what felt like hundreds of miles per hour. His mother quickly disappeared over the invisible horizon, and Mrs. Figg's room came back into focus. It rapidly changed from a dull gray to its full color again. Harry covered his eyes from the sudden flood of light. Then, just as his vision came back, so did his nerves.

"AAAHHH!" yelled Harry, collapsing onto the floor. It was pain as he had never experience before. It was as if millions of wizards were putting the Cruciatus Curse on him, each concentrating on a specific place on his body, strengthening its painful power over him. He was slowly being stretched to death on meat hooks while being burned to a crisp and acid poured all over his body.

Harry felt his eyes roll back into his head, and felt drool coming from his mouth. The pain was taking over his body and his mind. He couldn't even think of thinking a happy thought, it was impossible.

Then, just as quickly as the pain had come, it left. The green cloud around Harry disappeared, and his quavering arms fell from wriggling into the air, right onto the floor. Harry took several deep breaths, and wiped the drool from his mouth. He just noticed that everyone in the class was circled around him.

“Amazing!” said Mrs. Figg, looking at her watch. “Harry, I think you may have set a new record! Barely anyone’s ever prevented pain for that long! How did you do it?” Harry stood up, and shook himself, trying to get fully back into this world.

“My mom... she helped me,” said Harry. Everyone in the room gave him an expression of confusion, but the bell rang, saving Harry from having to make any other statements. Everyone except for Harry, Ron, Hermione and Mrs. Figg bolted out of the room.

“Harry, how did you do it?” said Mrs. Figg, still looking amazed. “You put off that curse for an hour!”

“Like I said,” said Harry, grabbing his books, “my mom helped me.”

“Well, she’ll be happy to hear that tomorrow...” said Mrs. Figg, smiling. “Speaking of which, I need you to come here, as early as possible tomorrow. Your mom was born at nine-thirty in the morning, so that is when we’ll have the most magical power on our side.”

“Yes, professor,” said Harry, running out of the room after Ron and Hermione.

“You were amazing Harry,” said Hermione immediately. “I only lasted for four minutes. But you just kept standing, with this odd expression on your face. Some of us thought you were dead.”

“Well... I’m not!” said Harry, throwing out his arms to clearly show that he was alive and well. He didn’t know if he would feel right telling them that he saw his dead mother, and she put her hand on his shoulder, calling his name. Harry decided just to keep that to himself.

“Our next test is... Charms,” said Ron, looking at a piece of paper.

“Thanks genius,” said Hermione sarcastically. “We’re already there.” Ron went red, seeing that they were right in front of the Charms classroom.

They took their seats with the rest of their class, and Professor Flitwick took no delay in passing out their exams. He said that their Advanced O.W.L. tests could take a while, and he wanted to have time for it.

Harry, whose hand was beginning to hurt and cramp from all the writing he had done so far today, reluctantly finished the test. He felt he did quite well too, being one of the first done. Neville, who finished last again, passed his test in, and Professor Flitwick quickly

put them away in desk. He had a kind of sinister smile on, like someone who was going to do something rotten, and enjoy it.

“I think you all shall enjoy the Advanced O.W.L. test, even though that may defeat the purpose of having the test at all,” he said, smiling. “This active exam will test both your physical and mental prowess, as well as your sharpness and quick thinking skills.”

He grinned and tapped the floor with his wand. It caused the room to shake slightly, and then something quite unexpected: the floor opened up. It was like a massive mouth. Then, out of the floor, came a small stadium. It was a perfect square, with a small, colored turret at each corner. Large, magical glass covered the entire arena, but it was so clear, unless you were a wizard, you couldn’t even tell it was there, and even if you were one, it was almost invisible.

“To get your Advanced Charms O.W.L., you will have to win a duel,” said Professor Flitwick. “Four of you will duel each other at once. We will start with two groups of four, and each group will face itself. The last two standing in each group will face each other, and the top three in that duel will get the Advanced Charms O.W.L. Simple enough for you?”

“Professor?” asked Hermione. “How will this test our physical strength?”

“That,” said Professor Flitwick, “is the fun part. You see, you, yourselves that is, will not fight. Each of you will clone yourselves, and force your clones to fight. The clones shall represent you in the field, and you may use any means possible to win, any spell you desire.”

Harry could hear chuckles and whispers all around him. People were thinking of using the Unforgivable Curses, ones that were illegal to use on humans, spells that could torture and kill. Harry felt himself even thinking of using them...but then he thought, what if the clones that were fighting were like the ones he, Ron, and Hermione had made? What if they thought they were the real ones, and didn't want to just be pawns in a duel, just created to die? Before Harry could think to hard, though, Professor Flitwick started calling out group assignments.

“Group one! You are Seamus Finnigan, Dean Thomas, Lavender Brown, and Harry Potter! Please come down to the arena and the rest of you, watch.”

Harry got up from his desk and to the front of the room. He walked over to the red turret, Dean to the blue one, Seamus to the green one, and Lavender to the black one.

“Clone yourselves,” said Professor Flitwick, hovering in the air, observing the arena like a bird. Harry pointed his wand at himself, and saw the other three do the same.

“Clonusout!” he yelled. Quite quickly, a solid copy of himself appeared inside the arena, right in front of him. Harry had evidently gotten stronger over the course of the year, the

last time he cloned himself, it took a few minutes. This one barely took seconds. He looked over, and saw that Seamus' had just speared, and Lavender and Dean were still trying to get theirs. After a few seconds, however, theirs appeared. Each clone, Harry noticed, appeared to look as though it were asleep.

"Ready competitors?" asked Professor Flitwick.

"Yes," said the four of them together. Harry hoped his clone would wake up soon.

"Well then, ready... set... go!" he yelled. Just as he said the last syllable, all of the clones' eyes opened. Each one looked alive, and ready to go. Harry's clone looked slightly worried, not knowing what was going on. He spun around, and saw Harry right behind him which, no doubt, added to his confusion.

"What! I'm y- I mean... you're me!" said his clone. Harry rolled his eyes and sighed. He didn't want to have to go through this again.

"Listen," said Harry seriously, "I don't have time to explain right now, but I need you to fight those other three in there." Harry lazily waved his wand in the general direction of the other three clones. His clone crossed his arms.

"Well I don't feel like it," said the clone. Just then, there was a flash of green light, and a think beam shot right passed Harry's clone. It made him jump, and Harry looked where it came from. He saw Lavender's clone, wand out and poised. Harry looked at her, and she raised a single eyebrow to him.

"Fine, explain later!" said Harry's clone, taking out his copied wand. "She almost hit me with the Killing Curse!"

"Good," said Harry. His clone was on his side, but he didn't have much time to think of a strategy. Lavender's clone was ready to strike again. Harry looked over at Seamus and Dean. Dean wasn't having too much luck, he was still arguing and pleading with his clone to fight. Seamus' clone looked like he about to faint.

"Clone!" yelled Harry. His clone spun around, pointing to himself.

"Me?" he asked.

"Yeah you! Who else!?"

"Don't call me 'clone'," he said. "It's derogatory." Harry rolled his eyes.

"Fine, what should I all you?"

"Call me Harry... oh no, that won't work. How about Harry Two? No, that's corny.... Hey! I got it: Harold."

“Whatever,” said Harry. “Harold! Take out Dean and Seamus! Use the newer Killing Curse!” Harold nodded, agreeing, he threw his wand out at Dean’s clone.

“Korosucide!” he yelled. A sparkling black light flew out from his wand, and hit Dean’s clone. It glowed purple for a split second, before it exploded into billions of microscopic pieces, like confetti. A sickening happiness flowed through Harry. He couldn’t help but smile. He had commanded someone to destroy someone else, and it was exhilarating. He had to do it again.

“Now get Seamus’!” yelled Harry. Harold did the same to Seamus’, blowing him into tiny bits. The same macabre joy came over Harry, and he grinned. Harold then turned to Lavender’s ready to strike.

“Korosucide!” he yelled. The beam shot out, as fast as light, but it seemed that Lavender’s clone was even faster. She teleported to the opposite side of the arena before the beam was even halfway to her.

“While you were so busy taking them out,” said Lavender, pointing to Seamus and Dean, “I made my clone put a Teleportation Charm on herself, in addition with the Speed of Thought Charm. Now, she can move even faster than a spell!”

Lavender’s clone popped around the arena a few more times, to show off her intense speed. It would be almost impossible to hit her with any spell. To make matters worse, her clone was invisible most of the time, only appearing for a millionth of a second after a teleportation.

“Now what?” asked Harold, trying to follow Lavender’s clone. Harry gritted his teeth. There was a way, put the same spells on his clone so they would be moving at the same speed. However, from what Harry had read, that was the most dishonorable thing to do, copy your opponent’s idea. It was far worse than losing a duel, even though you won. Most people who tried that were declared the loser anyway. Harry decided against it.

“Hey Harold!” yelled Harry, suddenly getting an idea.

“What?”

“When she teleports, she’s not really gone from this universe, is she? She’s just moving so fast that you can’t see her.”

“Yeah, but what does that do?” Harry smiled, maybe he and his clone weren’t exactly the same. Since Lavender’s clone was still in the arena at all times, even though she appeared invisible sometimes, she was susceptible to an Unavoidable Curse.

“Harold! Use the Unavoidable Heat Curse!” yelled Harry. Harold nodded, and took out his wand.

“Anataga atsuidesu!” he yelled. There was a red flash in the arena as the spell took action. It made Lavender’s clone freeze in mid-teleportation, and fall to the ground. He had hit her.

“Korosucide!” yelled Harold, pointing his wand right down at Lavender’s clone, who looked unconscious, lying at his feet. The spell immediately hit her, and she exploded into millions of tiny bits that soon disappeared into the air. Harry felt the surge of adrenaline pump through him again, making him feel more alive than ever. He almost envied his clone, who got to do the actual killing....

Harry shook his head hard, what was he thinking? Was he becoming like Malfoy, a vengeful sadist? Harry reassured himself, no. There was no way he’d ever be like Malfoy. This was just a test, not with real people... but they were real....

“Harry Potter is the first place winner for this round, and Lavender Brown is the second place winner!” announced professor Flitwick, de-railing Harry’s train of thought. He skipped back up to his chair, and sat down next to Harry and Hermione.

“I told you reading that Advanced Dark Arts book would help you,” said Hermione. “It was worth sneaking into the Restricted Section.”

“Yeah, I was the only one who knew the more powerful Killing Curse,” said Harry, sitting down. “That gave me a good advantage.”

“Yeah, that and being the only decent dueler down there,” said Ron. Hermione and Harry looked at him.

“What do you mean, Ron?” asked Harry.

“Well, Dean an Seamus are easy enough, and Lavender didn’t look that bad. But me, I have to go against Hermione and Neville!”

“Neville?!” said Harry and Hermione together. Ron leaned in closer, and beckoned Harry and Hermione to do the same.

“Well, you know, I sleep in the bed right next to him, and he usually keeps me awake all night with his terrible snoring. But, the past few months, especially the last few nights, he hasn’t snored at all.”

“Maybe he got some sort of treatment,” said Hermione. Ron shook his head.

“That’s what I thought at first too,” said Ron. “To investigate, one night I took Harry’s invisibility cloak after he fell asleep. I waited right in front of Neville’s bed, for him to come in. Not only did he come in long after everyone fell asleep, but he just laid there all night.”

“What do you mean, ‘just laid there’?” asked Harry.

“It was weird,” said Ron, contorting his face, “he just kind of lied down, but sat as well. He was also holding his hands oddly... it was like he was reading some sort of invisible book. Every now and then, he’d move his fingers like he was turning an invisible page, too. It was just... weird.”

“So, what does that have to do with anything?” asked Hermione, shaking her head.

“Well, he just started doing that a few nights after the Yule Ball, the night he was acting strange. And, ever since he’s started reading that book, he’s done better in school too, except for his occasional falling asleep in class. I think whatever he’s been doing has been making him... smarter.”

Harry and Hermione leaned back, and looked at each other. Just as they were going to make a comment, Professor Flitwick spoke again,

“Everyone who wasn’t in the last duel, please come down here now. That should be... Miss. Parvati Patil, Miss. Hermione Granger, Mr. Ron Weasley, and Mr. Neville Longbottom!”

Ron and Hermione walked down to the arena, amid many loud cheers from Harry. Ron went over to the red turret, and Hermione to the blue; Parvati walked to the green one, and Neville stood, looking quite serious, at the black one. Each of them pointed their wands at themselves, and made a clone. Surprisingly, Neville was the first one done, followed by Ron, then Hermione, and Parvati being last. Once again, each of the clones looked catatonic as it stood their, eyes closed and motionless.

“On your marks... get set... go!” yelled Professor Flitwick. The eyes of the clones shot open, and each turned to its original. Parvati seemed to be having some trouble convincing hers to fight, but Hermione and Ron, who had been through this rigmarole before, convinced theirs quite quickly. Unfortunately, it was not fast enough.

“Siragus!” yelled Neville’s clone, pointing right between Ron and Parvati’s clones. There was a giant explosion, knocking both clones against the glass of the arena. Neville’s clone then turned to his next victim, Hermione’s clone.

“Korosucide!” it yelled, without Neville even saying anything. Hermione’s clone quickly did a cartwheel out of the way, but she wheeled right into the hole Neville had made. His clone smiled.

“Serpensorta! Sendoni Asimi!” yelled Neville’s clone. A long, green snake shot out of his wand, followed closely by a tough, silvery sheet. The snake flew right into the hole Hermione’s clone had gone into, and the sheet covered the hole, trapping her inside with the reptile. There were several screams of terror that erupted from inside the hole, and

Harry saw Hermione's clone try to escape from it, pushing with all her strength against the sheet. Neville's clone was clearly in control of how this duel was going to end.

He turned his attention to Ron and Parvati's clones now, who were lowering themselves down from the sides of the arena. Neville's clone waited until they were both back on the ground before he made his move.

"Impalition!" he yelled at Ron's clone. Instead of a beam coming out, a large, wooden plank popped up from the ground behind Ron's clone. He tried to move away from it, but the more he moved, the closer he seemed to get to it. After a few seconds, his back appeared as though it were glued to the block.

Then, suddenly, a large, sharp, thin and metallic spike shot out from the plank, right through Ron's clone's stomach. There was a smatter of blood that shot from the point of impaling, it flew through the air, and landed on Parvati's clone's cheek. Ron's clone's eyes got cloudy, and rolled back. With his last ounce of strength, he gripped the spike that was now covered in blood. His hands then went limp, along with the rest of his body, and he died.

Neville immediately turned to Parvati's clone, and gave a sickening smile.

"Impalition!" he yelled at her. The plank immediately rose up behind her. She desperately tried to run away from it, clawing at the air, but it was all in vain. The plank was now touching her back. Knowing what was going to happen next, Parvati's clone gripped her stomach, and let a tear roll down from her eye, running through the smattered blood on her cheek. She turned her red eyes over to Parvati, who didn't look hurt at all, just disappointed.

"Why did you make me?" she asked through her tears. "Was it just so I could d-" The spike shot out from the plank, and impaled her as well, killing her immediately. Neville's clone wiped his hands against each other, and smiled. Just then, there was another scream from Hermione's clone. She was evidently still alive.

"Hentai Tsunami!" he yelled. A flaming tornado appeared right above the covered hole that Hermione was in. Harry heard Hermione's cone scream, but only for a second. It was snuffed out by the tornado destroying her. The flaming tornado disappeared, leaving behind only ashes and burn marks. Neville and his clone smiled.

It had to be the most grotesque and terrible vision Harry had ever seen, even worse than Azkaban. Hermione's clone's carcass was laying in the hole, with a puddle of blood and ash around it. On either side of the hole was a plank with a person impaled on it, each one gripping the spike that went through him or her. Harry felt like throwing up.

"Congratulations Mr. Longbottom, and Miss. Granger," said Professor Flitwick, "you and your clones are the winners!" Neville bowed to Professor Flitwick, and a tiny door

appeared in the side of the arena that his clone exited from. The door disappeared, and the entire arena returned to how it normally looked: carcass-less, hole-less, and blood-less.

Ron and Hermione stormed back to their seats, and Neville returned to his as well. Neville looked quite satisfied with himself, but a little tired as well, as if the spells really drained him. Ron and Hermione, however, looked downright miserable.

“What’s wrong?” asked Harry to Hermione. “You still won, didn’t you?”

“That’s not what’s bothering me,” said Hermione, pulling her chair out violently, and collapsing into it. “What’s bothering me is the way Neville won.”

“Yeah, he was pretty good,” said Harry. Hermione glared at him.

“Harry,” she said, “he showed no pity, no mercy. He just... killed them.”

“Well what did you expect him to do?” asked Harry, putting his hands behind his head, to try and show in his body language that he didn’t think anything was wrong.

“Come on Harry,” said Ron. “You have to think there was just something... wrong with the way Neville was acting, don’t you?”

“Well, I guess so,” said Harry. “But we don’t have time to discuss that right now. We have to go down for the next round.” They looked over, and saw that Lavender and Neville were already back at the arena, their clones out and ready. Harry’s clone was waiting for him by the invisible door into the stadium. Harry and Hermione ran over, Hermione to the red spot, and Harry to the blue.

“Alright, everyone,” said Professor Flitwick, “this is the last round! The top three from this round will get the O.W.L., so basically, the first one out is the only loser.”

Harry stared at Professor Flitwick. He wasn’t acting his usual jolly self. It wasn’t like him to speak of negative outcomes. But, Harry shrugged off that thought at Hermione produced her clone.

“One... two... three... don’t go! Heh, only kidding... go!” yelled Professor Flitwick, making everyone stumble.

“Harold!” yelled Harry to his clone, having an advantage over Hermione and Lavender since he already knew his clone, “take out Neville first!”

“Whatever you say captain,” said Harold sarcastically, brandishing his wand at Neville’s clone, and yelling the Killing Curse.

“Ardeur Booklier!” yelled Neville’s clone, just before Harold cast his spell. A glassy fire popped up, going around Neville’s clone, forming a shield. The fire absorbed the Killing Curse, and it grew larger, and became a light blue instead of a deep red.

“Whoa,” said Harold, “it took the offensive energy from the spell and somehow changed it into defensive energy, making his shield stronger!” Harry gritted his teeth. With that shield up, the more Harold hit Neville, the more powerful he would become. Harry looked over at Neville and saw that he was smiling. Harry had to think of something....

“Hermione! Lavender!” he yelled. The two of them, who were trying to convince their clones to fight for them, looked over. “We’ve got to team up, to beat Neville!” The two of them nodded, and their clones seemed to accept Harry’s small speech as a reason to start fighting. They got into their stances. Maybe if they gave the shield too much energy to absorb at once, it wouldn’t be able to handle it.

“Avada Kedavra!” yelled Lavender’s clone.

“Korosucide!” yelled Hermione’s clone.

The green light from Lavender’s wand, and the black light from Hermione’s hit Neville at the same time.

“That’ll get him, the fire can’t take all the energy at once...” thought Harry to himself.

However, they were better off if they had never used the spells. The fire absorbed them both, and turned a bright white; it was so bright, Harry had to shield his eyes. Neville was now laughing out loud.

“Harry, what do we do?” pleaded Hermione. Harry thought... each offensive spell they used on it just made it more powerful.... So, if they used a defensive spell on it, maybe it would become less powerful!

“Hermione! Lavender! Use your most powerful defensive spell on Neville’s clone!” yelled Harry. The two of them nodded, looking slightly confused, and ordered their clones to use the spells.

“Ennervate!” yelled Lavender’s clone.

“Kooverta Maximus!” yelled Hermione’s.

“Bakatcha!” yelled Harold.

“Teaming up against me again, eh Harry?” said Neville. “Ha! I’m not pathetic like I used to be anymore Harry, I can take whatever you give me... and give it right back, plus some!” Harry glared at Neville, watching him give a small laugh.

Once again, the three spells hit Neville's clone at the same time. At first, it looked as though it was going to work. The flame turned from its blinding white, to a light red. Then, just as Harry was getting his hopes up, it started spinning, swirling, and growing. Large chunks of fire shot off in every possible direction, destroying everything they landed on by causing it to burst into flames.

"AAAHHH!" yelled Lavender's clone as a flame hit her, sending her hair ablaze. She ran around the arena, as Hermione's clone desperately tried to put the fire out with some water from her wand, holding her hand over her hair, trying to prevent it from turning into a small inferno. After a few seconds, though, the flame shower stopped.

"It's the most powerful shield in the world, Harry," said Neville. "It absorbs offensive energy, and turns it into defensive energy, and it also absorbs defensive energy, turning it into offensive energy! There's no way I can lose!" Neville's eyes started to bulge as he spoke those words, and he laughed out loud, with a huge mouth, showering saliva all over.

"Now, Harry Potter," he yelled, "let me show you the true power of what I have become! Clone, you know what to do!"

Neville's clone nodded his head, and brandished his wand.

"Korewa Jigokudesu!" he yelled as loud as he could, almost shaking the room. Beneath the feet of the other three clones, a small crack appeared, that grew larger, quite quickly. As it grew, it started turning a bright red, and appeared as though it was getting hot since the clones were wincing and trying to step off of the cracks, even though they were unable. Then, the cracks turned into holes right beneath the clones, and out of the abyss came an inferno, engulfing each clone. Harry couldn't tell if the fire was breathing, the way it flowed like a snake, it almost looked alive.

Harry heard the screams that the clones gave, even though they were quickly drowned out by the roaring of the fire. Within seconds, however, the fire was gone, along with the crevices... and the clones. Not even a pile of ash was left. Harry, Hermione, and Lavender just stood there, dumbfounded at what had just happened. Professor Flitwick broke the deafening silence with some applause.

"Excellent work, Mr. Longbottom! Excellent! Top notch, I must say! I am always a fan of students who invent their own spells!" He flew right over to Neville and wrapped his arm around his shoulder, like a father would to his son. He started talking to him, completely unaware that he only had about two minutes of class left, and he still had to announce the winners of the duel. Except for obviously Neville, it appeared to be a tie.

"Ahem!" coughed Hermione loudly, causing Professor Flitwick to look at her.

"Yes, Miss. Granger?"

"Um... Professor? The results?" he looked at her for a second, as if not understanding what she was saying. Then, he appeared to pop back into reality.

"Oh! The winners, yes. Well... Mr. Longbottom, of course... and... you, Miss. Granger... and... well, Lavender did get her hair caught on fire, so, Harry beat her in that so, Mr. Potter too! You three are the winners!"

Harry let out a sigh of relief, at least he had gotten the O.W.L. Hermione looked satisfied, and Lavender looked indifferent to his decision. Neville, on the other hand, continued to talk to Professor Flitwick. He still had a excited look about him, and his eyes looked large, and they twitched every few seconds... Harry wondered if he was okay.

"That was some spell Neville used," said Hermione, walking back to her seat with Harry. "I wonder what it was."

"You mean you don't know?" said Harry, flabbergasted.

"No, I've never seen or heard of it before... maybe Neville did invent it."

"What? You can invent spells?" asked Ron, getting up from his seat in the audience.

"Well of course you can," said Hermione lazily, pulling her backpack on. "Where do you think they come from? Grow on trees? Of course, it does take a lot of Advanced Arithmancy to get it down right, and a spell that powerful... Neville making it... oh, it just doesn't make sense...."

Just then, the bell rang, and Harry remembered that he was only halfway through his tests; he still had four more to go. He rubbed his aching wrists, and walked out the door with Ron and Hermione, to their next exam, Herbology.

To get to the Herbology room, they had to pass the Gryffindor Common Room, whose door happened to be opened. Harry, Ron, and Hermione peeked inside and saw many younger wizards playing, along with some older sixth year wizards. None of them had to take tests today, all they were doing was playing games, and talking about what they were going to do over the vacation....

"Luckies..." sighed Ron, as they continued to walk.

"Well, they'll have to take the tests, same as us, soon enough," said Hermione. Ron still didn't look too happy. He decided to change the subject.

"I wonder what's going to happen to Neville's clone," he when they walked into the Herbology room.

"Well, seeing the sadistic way they treated the clones today," said Harry, "they may just kill it."

"No Harry," said Hermione, "They wouldn't kill a clone for no reason. Professor Flitwick just did that so he could test our knowledge of advanced spells, spells that we'll need to know in the real world."

"Yeah, when we're all Aurors," said Ron, smiling. Harry and Hermione sighed. Ron used that way too much.

Soon, the rest of the class filed in, and everyone took their seats. As Professor Sprout began passing out tests, Harry looked around. The class looked... smaller somehow.

He quietly pointed this out to Hermione, who looked around too, telling him that she didn't see Neville.

"Neville? Not make the Herbology O.W.L.? But, that's his best subject!" Hermione put her finger to her lip, indicating to Harry that he should be quiet. Harry tried to concentrate on his exam, but it was hard. Was Neville okay? What did he do that would cause him to miss the most important exam for his best class?

By the time Harry was halfway through the exam, he started to forget about Neville, and began to work much faster, to make up for the time he had lost worrying.

Harry finished his test last, but it didn't really matter to him much. He just walked back to his seat, feeling no different than is he had passed it in first.

The Advanced O.W.L. exam was the most boring and easy one they had so far. Each of them were given a choice of many ingredients, and they had to choose the best combination of them to make a plant grow as big as possible as quickly as possible.

Harry chose what he thought would be best, and his regular plant immediately sprouted ten feet into the air. Everyone else looked quickly at what ingredients he had used, and chose those as well. Suddenly, eight more ten-foot tall plants appeared. Professor Sprout looked appalled that everyone had done the same, except for Hermione and Ron.

Hermione didn't use what Harry did, she put a small, thin silvery substance into the mixture she had made before. She poured it all over the pot in which her plant was in. The pot immediately exploded into a million pieces as a twenty-foot high, and just as thick, plant exploded out. Huge mouth-like bulbs appeared at the ends of several tendrils, and they grew quite fast as well. When they were about the size of basketballs, they opened up with a roar as teeth and lips appeared.

"Very impressive Miss. Granger!" said Professor Sprout.

It was now Ron's turn. Harry didn't see what he had mixed together. Ron poured it all over his plant and it took a second for any reaction to take place. Then, a small brussel sprout-like bulb popped out from the dirt. It grew larger and larger, until it was huge, at

least having a fifteen foot diameter. It grew a mouth, just as Hermione's did, but instead of growling, this one let out a giant, smelly, loud burp.

"Very nice as well, Mr. Weasley," said Professor Sprout, holding her nose from the stench. "You, Miss. Granger, and Mr. Potter will each receive the Advanced O.W.L."

"But what about us, professor?" asked Parvati, also holding her nose. Professor Sprout glared at her.

"You are lucky you will not be expelled for cheating, Miss. Patil, and that goes for the rest of you. You should be thankful I only am punishing you like this." Parvati bowed her head sadly, and walked off, to wait for the bell to ring with the rest of the Gryffindors and the Hufflepuffs.

"Professor Sprout," asked Harry, a few minutes later, "what's wrong with Neville? Will he be okay?"

"Neville? Oh, yes. He isn't feeling too good... he shall be fine, though."

"And what about his tests?" asked Harry. However, just then, the bell rang.

"I'm sorry Mr. Potter," she said, "I don't have time to talk. I need to prepare for my next class' test." She shoved Harry aside and started making the plants and the mess they had made disappear. Harry, Ron, and Hermione ran out.

"Hermione, how did you get your plant to grow so big?" asked Ron. "I thought Harry's was as big as it could get." Hermione smiled.

"Well, I added a little... special ingredient..." she said smugly.

"What was it?" asked Harry excitedly.

"Unicorn hair," said Hermione. "It's a very magical substance, concerning plants. If I had added more, the plant probably would have grown to the size of the room!"

"But Hermione... Professor Sprout didn't have any unicorn hair available to use- oh... I see," said Ron, catching on.

"All I did was transform part of my arm into the unicorn leg. I pulled off a few hairs quickly, and put them in."

"That's Hermione," said Ron, "getting good grades, even if it means putting part of herself into the potion!"

"Well," said Hermione, trying not to laugh which was especially hard since Harry was cracking up, "you got the O.W.L. too."

“Yep,” said Ron, looking happy, “my third one! I already got one in Transfiguration and Defense Against the Dark Arts. I succumbed to the pain right before Hermione, and she was the best... except for you Harry.”

They arrived at the Potions dungeon, ready for their next exam. Hermione threw the door open and there, at the head of the class was no other than Professor Snape.

## **Chapter 27- Dungeons and Dragons**

Ron stopped in his tracks, and turned white; Hermione's jaw dropped to the floor; and Harry's eyes became the size of baseballs. What was professor Snape doing here? He had been gone all year, why was he returning now? He glared at them, with his pointy nose, and greasy appearance. He looked no different than when Harry had seen him at Azkaban.

"That will be five points from Gryffindor," he hissed at them, "...each. You are two minutes late, that is two minutes less that everyone will have to work on the exam. What are you still doing standing Potter! Sit down and get ready! Another five points!"

Harry, Ron, and Hermione took their seats, not moving their gaze from Professor Snape. He was holding a thick stack of papers, and was passing them out.

"I know all you are wondering the same thing," he said as he passed out the tests, "why am I here? Well, I can answer that for you. I have been away all year, helping the Aurors try and defeat Vold- You-Know-Who. It has come to my attention that during my absence, a certain Mr. Fletcher watched over my class.... Well, I know him, and we shall see if he did a good job teaching you, now won't we?"

He emphasized the 'e' as he glared at Harry, trying to physically show the same hate towards him that he always did. Through his cold stare, though, Harry saw a new warmth inside him, his eyes were on fire, not icy and cold as he remembered them. He also didn't seem afraid to say Voldemort's name anymore, from his stutter before. Maybe he knows something about Voldemort that makes him know his weakness so he doesn't' think of him as a threat anymore. Though, Harry thought... he had never heard Professor Snape refer to Voldemort by name, or by You-Know-Who before, so he couldn't be sure if he was being brave, or just trying not to scare the children.

"You have one hour... starting now!" he roared at them, spinning around and sitting down at his desk to correct more exams. Harry looked down at his test, it was even worse then Professor Binns'. All it contained was ten pages... all essays. Harry looked over and saw Hermione, already halfway through the first essay. He looked to his other side, and saw Malfoy, not looking his usual conceited self. Harry then turned his head back to his own exam, let out a loud sigh, and started writing.

A few seconds before the hour was up, Professor Snape sat up from his desk. Harry still had half of his last essay to write, and he quickly rushed through it, making the last few words nothing but illegible scribbles.

"Time is up!" yelled Professor Snape, banging his fist down on the nearest desk, which happened to be Dean's. He jumped at least a foot in the air, and fell over in his chair. Professor Snape remained indifferent to this occurrence, and grabbed his exam from the desk. He moved his head from side to side, looking disappointed with whatever Dean had written. He walked back to his desk, test still in hand, and grabbed a small pot, and two

little containers that looked exactly the same. He placed the pot in front of Dean, and a container on either side. He then pointed his wand over the pot, and filled it with water.

“Thomas,” he said, with a sinister smile, “your test disappoints me. Just after looking at the first page, I can tell that this is a failing paper.”

“I- I...” stuttered Dean.

“Now now Thomas,” said Snape, waving a finger, and grinning even more. “I am not that evil as to fail you right now, I will give you a chance to make up for your pathetic test, by getting the Advanced O.W.L.”

“Re- really?” said Dean, trying to look happy.

“Oh yes,” said Professor Snape. He held Dean’s test right in front of him, and tapped it with his wand. He let go of it, and it remained in the air. Snape gave an evil grin, and tapped the test again. A tiny flame appeared in the corner. Dean looked terrified.

“My test!” he yelled.

“Here is your predicament, Thomas,” said Professor Snape, speaking extremely fast. “Before you there are two identical containers. One, when mixed with water, will create a powerful anti-fire potion. The other, when mixed with water, will create an even more powerful lighter fluid, causing your test to turn into nothing more than a few ashes.

“Now, if you wish to save your abysmal test, and attempt at an Average O.W.L., I suggest you now begin searching your pathetic brain for which substance will do which. If you succeed, not only will you maybe get the Average O.W.L., but you will get the Advanced O.W.L for passing this test. Come on now! What are you waiting for?” Dean looked like he was almost in tears.

“B- b- but I don’t know which one is which,” he whined. The entire bottom part of his test was smoldering.

“Then you have not learned anything this year, Dean,” said Professor Snape. “And you must learn what you do not know quickly! I’d say you have about... ten seconds left.” Dean immediately grabbed one of the containers of mystery substance, and opened the lid.

“Nine seconds...” whispered Professor Snape.

Dean put his nose to whatever he opened, and immediately shot his face back. It evidently had some sort of powerful putrid odor.

“Eight seconds...”

He grabbed the other one and threw the lid off, putting it to his nose. This one evidently had a better smell, Dean almost smiled after breathing in its scent.

“Seven seconds...”

He stuck his fingers in the good-smelling one, and was surprised to find a pink goo stick to them as he tried to pull them out.

“Six seconds...”

Dean quickly threw that container aside and picked up the other one, sticking his fingers inside. A white powder stuck to his fingers, and held it to his nose.

“Five...”

He sneezed.

“Four...”

Dean set that container down. He was sweating now... he evidently didn't have a clue as to which one was correct, and which was wrong. It all came down to a fifty-fifty chance, a guess, with a lot at stake.

“Three...”

Dean quickly looked back and forth between the two substances, as if playing some sort of game to help him decide which one.

“Two...”

Dean, not being able to wait any longer, chose the sticky substance.

“One...”

Dean grabbed a bunch of the goo from inside the container, put some water on it, and threw it at his test, which was now a floating flame.

“Zero.”

The goo hit the paper. Then, it appeared that someone had hit the rewind button on the paper. The flames immediately disappeared and tiny pieces of the paper flew in from all directions, forming the original sheets. The paper fell from its hovering position, right onto Dean's desk. He breathed a huge sigh of relief, and wiped the sweat from his face. Professor Snape, on the other hand, looked livid. He looked as though the Grinch had stolen Christmas, and he was supposed to get the best present of his life.

“Dumb luck,” he mumbled as he walked with clenched fists back to his desk, grabbing everyone’s tests as he went along. He threw them into a drawer, and shut it hard, causing an enormous “bang!”, making his hair fly all over the place, giving him a look of insanity.

This was the Professor Snape they had all known and loved.

“For the rest of you that want to try at the Advanced O.W.L.,” he said through clenched teeth, “please come up to my desk.”

Everyone in the room, except for Dean, slowly walked up to the head if the class, making a circle around his large desk, which was now covered with papers.

“Now, the usual exam involves me chopping off one of your limbs, and forcing you to make a potion that will somehow grow them back, or heal them,” he growled to them. “Well, the Ministry of Magic thought that was going too far, so this year, I’ve been forced to come up with a new test.”

With that, he opened a drawer in his desk, and took out a small stack of tiny pieces of parchment.

“Making a potion is just as much about magic as it is about logic,” he said, giving a slip to everyone. “On this pieces of paper, there is a riddle about the ingredients for a potion. List the correct ingredients, and what the final potion will be. If you get them all correct, you get the O.W.L. And hurry up! You’ve only got about forty minutes left!”

Harry ran back to his seat, and looked at his sheet of paper. It read:

“I am one third the word used when declaring something ‘is’,

One third ‘piz’,

And one third the word that a baby says.

I am something you may find in your hair,

Under a car,

And inside fair.

The last piece of me is the god of gold,

It makes everyone greedy,

And keeps you very old..

What is the potion described?"

Harry scratched his head hard. What kind of test was this? Everyone else in the class seemed to be stuck on it as well. Harry glanced at it again.

"What does it mean? I don't get it," thought Harry to himself. Even though he had been through other riddles before (once in his first year, and last year), he just couldn't seem to make sense of this one.

"I must be tired from the other tests," said Harry to himself. "I can't think straight.... Well, let's see here. I'll break it down. Maybe each paragraph is describing an individual ingredient....

"So, hmm... what is a word used when declaring something 'is'? Oh, I got to think back to my years at a Muggle school... what was the infinitive form of the verb 'is'...? Ah yes! To be! So, it is 'be'. And the other part, oh, he gives it to us, 'piz'... but I don't know any ingredients that start with 'bepiz'. Oh well, how about the last clue? A word that a baby says.... That one's easy! 'Ga'! All babies say 'ga ga'. So, 'bepizga'? No, that's not it... oh! Begapiz! That's a very common ingredient. I think it makes stuff stronger..."

Amazed and happy with himself for figuring out the first ingredient, Harry quickly moved onto the second.

"What's something you would find in your hair, under a car, and inside a fair? Hmm... maybe they're not all connected like that, though. Maybe each one is describing a part of the word, like before! Okay, what's something you may find in your hair?"

Harry scanned the room, looking for any sign of what someone would wear in their hair. Then, when he got to Lavender, he saw it. A bandana. She was wearing a pink one in her hair. Maybe that was it....

"Alright! Next part... under a car? Well, Uncle Vernon never repaired the car himself, much less allowed me to learn anything about them. So, I'm kind of stuck here... unless.... Well, I know that the motor of a car is in the front, and I think part of it goes under the car as well, so I'm going to say 'motor' for this part of the clue..."

Bandanamotor? That doesn't sound correct....

"Oh well, I'll think about that later! Now, what's something I'd find in a fair? I'm assuming he means a carnival, of course. So... a Ferris wheel? No. A merry-go-round? No. Smelly popcorn everywhere? No... arg! What could it be?

"Well, maybe it doesn't mean a carnival... maybe it means a different kind of fair... like impartialness! Justice! Okay, what is inside those ideas? Well, nothing really makes them up since they are not... real. So... a person I guess says them. But what kind of person is impartial and nice? Wait! That's it! Nice! Nice is the word. Niceness makes up fairness.

“Alright! So, Bandanamotornice? No, that’s can’t be right. I must have gotten one of them wrong... but which one? Hmm... nice? No, that’s right. Motor? Well, I did just guess on that one? Bandana? Well, what else are you going to wear in your-”

Harry looked over and aw, sitting next to Lavender, Parvati. She was wearing a bow in her hair.

“That’s it! A bow, not a bandana! Alright, Bomotornice. That sounds familiar... oh yeah! That’s one of the three legendary ingredients I read about last night! Let’s see, there was Bomotornice, Havomotornice, and Gomotornice. I think Bomotornice is a powerful, but much safer version of unicorn blood. Thank goodness I read that last night, we didn’t learn anything about that this year in class.”

Excited from figuring out the second clue, Harry went onto the next and last one.

“The god of gold? Where did I hear that before, it sounds so familiar...” Harry closed his eyes, and tried to retrace his life, day by day. No, he hadn’t heard it in school... it was before school started.... Then it hit him.

“Thank you Sirius!” Harry said to himself. “So this makes... how many times you’ve helped me?” Harry remembered that Harry had read in the newspaper, while at Mrs. Figg’s house, the god of gold... it was the Sorcerer’s Stone, a stone that gave immortality and infinite wealth.

“Alright!” yelled Harry in his brain, “I’ve got the three ingredients: Begapiz, Bomotornice, and a Sorcerer’s Stone... now what potion do those three make?”

Harry sat there, stroking his chin, and watched the others work all around him. It seemed that everyone was having trouble with it, except for Malfoy it appeared. He just loomed over his paper and was writing all over it. Occasionally, Harry saw Crabbe or Goyle try and peek on Malfoy’s paper for the answer, but they were far too slow and stupid. Malfoy just hit them in the face whenever they tried to cheat off his paper. Seeing they would never get any answers from him, Crabbe and Goyle turned their heads toward Tci’s paper. He didn’t seem to be having to much pitifully with it either.

“Well, let’s see,” said Harry to himself, “The Begapiz will enhance the power of the Bomotornice and the Sorcerer’s Stone. So, the enhanced Bomotornice will react with the Sorcerer’s Stone resulting in... what? Well, some sort of very powerful life potion, possibly able to bring people back to life... but no, no potion can do that. Maybe, it will make someone powerful enough to become a god practically. Who knows that the new powers the Begapiz will give the Sorcerer’s Stone... and the Bomotornice will definitely make the person at least almost immortal...”

“Wait! That’s it! I’ve read about this potion before! The Almost Immortal Potion! I read that it has never been made, since every time one person gets one ingredient, and they go searching for another, they have mysteriously died. Yes! That’s it!”

Harry quickly wrote down the name of the potion on the small sheet of paper, along with the names of the three ingredients. He scribbled a short description of what the potion did, and the second he lifted his pencil off the paper, the bell rang, signaling the end of the test.

“Time is up!” yelled Professor Snape. He prowled the desks, yanking the tests away from everyone, not even looking at them.

“Go away, now,” he said when he had collected them all. The class immediately started to file out. Harry, however, decided to talk to Malfoy a bit before leaving.

“So, Malfoy, did you get the Advanced O.W.L.?” Malfoy picked up his books, and turned his head towards Harry. At first, he gave him a hard stare, but then, he smiled at him.

“Of course I did,” he said, “with you yelling the answer in your head so loud, it’s a wonder the rest of the class didn’t hear you.” Harry’s eyes grew wide, and he went cold.

“You- you heard me... thinking?” Malfoy zipped up his backpack, and threw it over his shoulder.

“Well yeah,” he said, in a ‘duh’ tone of voice. “Didn’t you learn anything from our duel? All Animagi are connected... some more so than others I guess. Weasley and Granger didn’t look like they were having the easiest time in the world on that exam.”

Harry just stared at Malfoy as he got up, and walked to the door.

“But, I mean, you looked like you were getting it, but it still looked as though something was troubling you... I thought it was because you didn’t have the answer.”

Malfoy stopped right in his tracks, a few inches from the door. He spun around, and his face met Harry’s eyes.

“Do you really want to know what’s troubling me, Potter?” he asked. Harry folded his arms and smirked.

“Well, I know what it is now: me beating you... two times in a row.”

Malfoy shook his head.

“Potter, I do have a life outside of you. No, while those two defeats have hurt me considerably, that’s not what has been worrying me. Believe it or not, Potter, what has been worrying me is... you.”

“I knew it, because I beat you!” said Harry, trying to rub it in more.

“No you idiot,” said Malfoy bitterly. “This has nothing to do with dueling or Quidditch. This has to do with... your mom.” Harry gave a look of confusion. Was this another one of Malfoy’s insults coming up, or was he serious? But, how could he know about what Harry was planning to do?

“What about her?” asked Harry. “She’s still dead, isn’t she?”

“Well, that’s just it,” whispered Malfoy, coming in closer. “I really don’t know. Now, I’m not going to say how I got this information, but I think Voldemort’s planning something, and it involves her somehow.”

What was Malfoy up to? Sure, his family had always been on Voldemort’s side, and he probably let out all his plans to them during meetings, but why was Malfoy telling him this? He had to know before he took him seriously.

“Why are you telling me this?” asked Harry, trying to look serious. Malfoy did something surprising. He walked up to Harry, and put his cold hand on Harry’s shoulder. At first, Harry thought he was going to shudder.

“Harry,” said Malfoy. This surprised Harry, Malfoy never referred to him by his first name. “You’re like... well, let me just say this. If I’ve learned one thing my entire life, it’s that having a good enemy is more valuable than having a good friend. Enemies... they give you someone to focus everything on: hatred, anger, things you could never do to your friends unless you wanted to lose them. And, well, I don’t want to lose you as an enemy, Potter.”

As weird and perverse a comment that was, it touched Harry. And, the more he thought about it, the more he couldn’t help the thought that if Malfoy ever... died, he’d feel terrible. Malfoy must have felt the same way.

“Thanks, Draco,” said Harry. Malfoy winced.

“No. Okay, let’s stop this,” he growled. He ripped his hand off of Harry shoulder, and rubbed it on his pants. “Just... just be careful Potter.” And with that, he walked out of the room. Harry began walking out, to catch up with Hermione and Ron, when Professor Snape called to him.

“Potter!” he yelled. Harry sighed and turned around. What was he going to do now? Take another ten points off from Gryffindor for taking too long to leave?

“Excellent job on the Advanced O.W.L. test. Thirty-five points to Gryffindor.”

Harry nearly fell over. What was he doing? He never gave points to Gryffindor! Then, Harry thought, the thirty-five points he was giving them now would make up for the thirty-five they had lost at the beginning of class.

“Now don’t make me take away those points again!” said Professor Snape. “You’re going to be late for dinner! Go along!”

Harry smiled, and ran out of the room. He didn’t stop running until he got to the Great Hall that was filled with all seventh years and fifth years, taking a dinner break from their exams before their last two. Harry sat down, next to Ron and Hermione, who were both already busy eating.

Harry couldn’t believe it. So far this year, his three worst enemies were becoming three good friends. First Dudley, then Malfoy, even though they were ‘enemies’, and now Snape. All this happiness flowing through Harry mad him almost forget that today was the day of the O.W.L.s, and made him not hear the bell, signaling the end of dinner, and the beginning of their next exam, and the one they were most looking forward to: Care of Magical Creatures.

As Harry walked down to grounds near Hagrid’s hut, he saw many other students walking down there whom he didn’t recognize.

“Umm, are you sure you’re in this class?” Harry asked two first year Gryffindors. Harry recognized them as Akshay and Joe.

“Oh, me? No Mr. Potter!” squeaked Akshay. “I heard that the Ravenclaw’s and Hufflepuff’s test was awesome, and I don’t want to miss this one!”

“And I heard they’re going to be playing some Vanilla Ice!” said Joe, moving his hips around in a circle. Akshay grabbed a hold of him.

“Joe, you’re so weird,” he said. As they ran off, and Harry thought he heard Akshay randomly yell ‘Linux’ or something.

“Man, that kid needs help,” said Ron.

“Akshay comes from a family of computer programmers,” said Hermione. “He’s used to things going logically, not spontaneous magic. He finds it very exciting, more so than the other first years.”

“What, do you interview all of the new students Hermione?” asked Ron.

“Just the ones I think are interesting,” she piped. Harry was about to ask her how she determined which students were ‘interesting’, but a blinding light appeared in the air. Harry shielded his eyes for a second, then receded them, to see where the illumination was from. Harry saw before him four massive poles, and at the top of each, there was a bright light, revealing an entire stadium in the darkness, right next to Hagrid’s hut.

The stadium was almost as big as the Quidditch field, but not as high. At one end it was blue, and on the other it was red. Protruding from either end of the stadium was a small

clear box, large enough for one person to fit in. All around the stadium, there were bleachers, on which several underclass students and sixth years were already seated on. Suddenly, Hagrid came running up to Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

“Hagrid,” said Harry, “what’s all this for?” Hagrid clapped his hands together, and rubbed them. He had a slightly insane look in his face.

“It’s fer yer test ‘Arry!” he belched, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “I though’ we coul’ let th’ res’ of th’ school watch.”

“Sounds like a good idea Hagrid,” said Harry. “It should be fun.”

“Tha’s wha’ I’m hopin’.”

“But, what about our Average O.W.L. test?” asked Hermione.

“Oh, y’all can pass tha’ silly exam easily enough,” said Hagrid, shrugging it off. “I’m not gonna give it ter yeh. Besides, the Advanced O.W.L. test will definitely take th’ entire two hours.”

“Whatever you say Hagrid,” said Harry, thankful that he could rest his wrists for a while before his last test.

“Now I gotta go an’ do th’ announcements,” said Hagrid, running off to the stadium. Harry, Ron, and Hermione went over to the bleachers with the rest of their class, eager to watch as well.

“Ladies an’ gentlemen,” boomed Hagrid’s voice from the center of the stadium, “welcome to the test for the Advanced Care of Magical Creatures O.W.L.!”

There was quite a bit of applause, and Harry was surprised to see that the bleachers were completely full, even with a few teachers here and there. Some of the younger students were asleep, their heads on their friends. Harry pointed them out to Ron who couldn’t help but laugh.

“Well, it is late isn’t it?” said Hermione in her famous matter-of-factly voice. Now that Harry thought about it, it was very late, the latest they had ever officially been “in class”. Harry looked at his watch, and saw that it was just a little past ten o’ clock. The extremely bright lights must have made him forget that it was so late.

“I’ll be doin’ this tes’ like they did fer th’ Duelin’ Club,” said Hagrid again. “Out of th’ eleven students here, I will draw ther names ou’ of this hat two at a time. Th’ two tha’ I draw will battle ther dragons, an’ th’ winner’s name will stay in th’ hat, and the loser’s will not go back in. Th’ las’ five names in th’ hat will get th’ Advanced O.W.L.”

"Now, there'll be no commentating' on this test, so as not to scare th' dragons. So, you'll hafta watch very well to see wha's goin' on. Now, fer th' names!" He reached into his large tattered hat, and drew two pieces of parchemnt out. "Our firs' pair of... well... dragon fighters... are... 'Arry Potter, an' Vincen' Crabbe!"

Harry, full of adrenaline and nervousness, jumped up from his seat, and ran the short distance to the box on the red side of the arena. The view from the box was quite different from the bleachers. Since it was clear on all sides, Harry felt as though he were floating in air, right above the grassy stadium. From here, it looked much higher up.

Harry could also see Crabbe, directly across the arena from him. He didn't look nearly as confident as Harry. He looked wiped out from the tests, and his skin was totally white.

"An' now presentin'... th' dragons!" yelled Hagrid, who was now outside of the stadium, and in the middle of the bleachers. Loud and fast music started playing, and Harry looked down, and saw two dark circles appear on either side of the arena. Out each hole, a dragon popped out.

Harry's Hungarian Horntail was looking extremely vicious, being the height of the stadium. Its teeth were bulging out of its mouth, and liquid fire was pouring out through the space between them. Its skin was a healthy shade of dark red, and the spikes shooting out of its leathery skin were all jet black. It let out a massive roar that thundered throughout the arena.

Crabbe's dragon, on the other hand, was a Canadian Crawler. It was about half the size of Harry's Hungarian Horntail, and it was a light blue color all over, except for its green head. It gave a small screech, nothing compared to Harry's dragon's roar.

Hearing Crabbe's dragon's noise, Harry's dragon turned its head over to see Crabbe's. It glared down at the Canadian Crawler, and blew smoke out of its nostrils. Crabbe's dragon looked up at it, and spun around. The two dragons were now face to face, and the battle had begun. The winner would be decided by the previous training each of them had given their dragon. Harry had trained his dragon every day during class, even named him Woodworm. But Crabbe, who had slacked off and played around, gave his dragon the disadvantage.

"And they're off!" yelled Hagrid. Harry's dragon shot up into the air, not taking its eyes off of Crabbe's dragon, and then breathed a massive fireball right at it. "Now remember! When I say ter stop, you got to stop, an' th' duel 's over!"

"Run!" yelled Crabbe as loud as he could, pressing his face up against the wall of the box. But, his dragon didn't move. Crabbe looked as though he wished he had spent more time training his dragon. It started scratching its neck with its short leg, and giving off some sort of loud purring noise.

The fireball hit it right in its chest and knocked it backwards. It looked extremely surprised, and roared when its back hit the ground, causing a small earthquake.

“Come on Woodworm! Slash him up!” yelled Harry. Just like Harry had trained it to do, Woodworm gave him a thumbs up, and did as he was told. He squatted down, and then jumped high into the air, landing right on Crabbe’s dragon. He put his legs across Crabbe’s dragon’s stomach, it took one long arm, and pushed Crabbe’s dragon’s head down to the ground, and started slashing with its other free arm. Crabbe’s dragon was howling more and more with every slash. It tried in vain to push Woodworm off, but the more it pushed, the more it slashed. Eventually, it just gave up.

“Stop th’ fight!” yelled Hagrid. These words seemed to have a magically effect on the dragons as they both froze in the positions they were in, and the black holes appeared back in the ground below them. The dragons simply disappeared. “‘Arry Potter is th’ winner!” Harry smiled, and ran back to his seat, amid much cheering from the tired crowd.

“So far so good,” he said to Ron and Hermione.

“Man, Harry,” said Ron, “you slaughtered Crabbe’s dragon! He didn’t even put up a fight compared to yours!”

“Well, I guess I trained mine well,” said Harry. “Either that, or Crabbe just did a really terrible job with his.”

“Shh!” said Hermione. “Hagrid’s announcing the next pair!”

“-nex’ duel is... Miss. Pansy Parkinson and Miss. Hermione Granger!”

Hermione skipped to the red box, same as Harry, trying to look happy. However, she looked quite nervous, not being used to performing in front of a very large audience like Harry and Ron were, from playing Quidditch. Pansy Parkinson, a Slytherin girl, looked right at home up in her blue box.

Once again, the dragons rose out from the ground from below. Hermione’s Transylvanian Three-Headed Terror looked even more ferocious than Woodworm did. All three of its heads were nothing more than some space for its massive teeth to take up. Its body was a dark green, and the silvery spikes protruding from every inch of its hide made it look even more devastating. The things that really made this dragon special, though, was its tail. The tail, at first glance, looked like the most harmless part of the dragon’s body, unless you looked at the tip. It was a small hole that had several small spikes surrounding it. It wasn’t the spikes that was intimidating, thought, it was the acid pouring out of the hole. It constantly bubbled out, like some sort of horrible fountain. Since the dragon’s hide was so thick and strong, it didn’t hurt itself, but the acid would sear a hole right through anything else.

Pansy's little Mexican Muncher looked like some sort of pathetic joke next to Hermione's terror. It was about one fourth of Hermione's dragon's size (due to Pansy's poor care), and it was a light brown. All of its claws were dull, and it only had two small teeth that looked chipped. All in all, it didn't stand a chance.

"Use your acid, Sacrenfer!" yelled Hermione. She, like Harry and Ron did, named her dragon as well, to make commands easier. Sacrenfer immediately spun around, and shot its tail into the air. A fountain of bubbling green acid came pouring out of the tip. It flew through the air at a high speed, and landed right on Pansy's dragon. Her dragon let out a loud roar as white smoke started forming where the acid had hit its skin. The hide of her dragon was beginning to bubble from the acid's reaction as well.

"Um... do... something?" said Pansy, looking quite bewildered. Her dragon gave her one quick, confused look, and then collapsed to the ground, smoke still pouring off of its skin.

"Hermione's the winna'!" yelled Hagrid. There was a lot of applause as people woke up from "resting their eyes" on the bleachers. Harry and Ron, however, didn't stop clapping until Hermione had returned to her seat next to them.

"Why are you applauding so much?" she asked. "That battle was far easier done than said!"

"It doesn't matter," said Ron, just stopping his clapping. "Whether you had a great victory, a pathetic victory, or even lost, we'd applaud just the same!" Harry gave him a smile and nod of approval, and Hermione smiled.

"Thanks guys," she said as she sat down.

"A'ight! A'ight!" said Hagrid, trying to calm down the excited crowd. "Our nex' battle 's gonna be between... Mr. Gregory Goyle an'... Mr. Ron Weasley!"

The audience gave an enthusiastic cheer as the two competitors walked to their boxes. This time, Ron took the blue box, and Goyle took the red one. Immediately, the two holes in the ground appeared, and the dragons popped out.

"Where are the dragons coming from?" Harry asked Hermione. "They seem to just pop out of the ground."

"Well," said Hermione, "the chamber that they were kept in was just below the ground here, so it's pretty easy to just make some holes appear in their ceiling, and then force them up through it."

"I'd hate to be part of the crew that had to force the dragons through the holes," said Harry. "Man, what did they do to deserve that?"

But, Harry and Hermione's attention had now turned to the two dragons that popped out of the ground. Goyle's was the best dragon of the Slytherin's so far. He had a Golden Germanic Glider, and it looked quite elegant. It was at least forty feet long, and extremely slender, like a snake. Its entire body was a light golden color, and it looked quite ferocious.

Just by looking at Ron's dragon, you would think that Goyle's victory was in the bag. His dragon was extremely fat, the size of several elephants, only with no muscle. Its torso was so incredibly large, that it appeared as though it had no limbs. Its neck barely popped out of the top of its giant bulge, and the dragon's orange, black, yellow and purple stripes did not give it any more of a ferocious appearance.

All the time Ron was training it, though, he kept reminding himself of the "special power" that Hagrid had spoke of; the power that all African Abysmalls had, only no one had ever bothered to raise it enough to try and discover what it was exactly.

"Come on Tapescrew!" yelled Ron. "Let's see what you got!" Tapescrew looked at Ron, appearing slightly confused as to what was going on. It spun its head back around, and saw Goyle's dragon. It glared its eyes at it, and gave a deep roar.

Goyle's dragon, however, didn't try to intimidate Tapescrew. It decided to attack immediately. It jumped up into the air, and hovered there, looking quite magnificent. It stiffed itself up, into one extremely long form, and started spinning. The dragon then shot forward through the air, like a bullet right at Tapescrew. It hit him, bouncing right off, but not before causing it extreme pain.

Tapescrew let out another roar, this time, there was a hint of pain in it. Goyle's dragon then went back into its normal, hovering form, and shot backwards, out of the way of danger. Tapescrew tried to make a grab for it, but missed and fell over.

"Come on Tapescrew!" yelled Ron again. "Get up and use your weight!" Tapescrew immediately jumped up, surprising the crowd. Its tiny wings fluttered, and it slowly rose into the air. When it was just above the height of the box, it stopped fluttering its wings, and fell to the ground, causing a massive earthquake. The entire stadium shook from the force of its immense weight, and even the bleachers vibrated.

Goyle's dragon, however, was unaffected by it. It was in the air, and the earthquake didn't even phase it. It just reared back, and shot a giant fireball from its mouth, straight at Tapescrew who was lying on the ground, collapsed from its previous attack. The fireball struck it, right in the face. Fire sprang up all around its head, and Tapescrew started scrambling around, shooting fire all over.

The fire, however, was not a reddish color, it was a golden instead. It got brighter and brighter, and began to expand, not coming just from Tapescrew's mouth, but from all over its body. It stopped scrambling around now, and just stood there, giving off its heavenly glow, looking completely oblivious to everything.

Then, it happened. It looked like a snake that was shedding its skin, only much faster, and much larger. Tapescrew's multicolored skin just... fell off. It was a very odd sight. Harry expected to see the insides of the dragon, its guts and blood, come flowing out all over. But, to his surprise, there were no bodily fluids anywhere to be seen. All that there was, standing on the massive flesh of the previous dragon, was a giant, blue orb. It looked like a massive rubber band ball, all coiled up. Then, it gave off a dazzling glow, and started to unfold. Very slowly at first, then faster and faster, it uncoiled, revealing an extremely long and thick... thing.

The thing brought its head up, and gave out a roar, even though it had no visible mouth. But, that was about to change. All over, scales began to form, each with its own small spike. Its head grew a mouth, a giant mouth, with teeth all inside it. Two red eyes popped up above its massive mouth, along with several white horns. Then, it suddenly burst into flames. A blue inferno covered its entire now golden body. It was a sight to behold.

“That must be the secret power of the Abysmall,” whispered Hermione to Harry, looking just as amazed as the rest of the audience. “After just a few fights, it must become powerful enough to be able to shed its skin and reveal its true power! This is amazing!”

Ron, who was now jumping up and down with delight, decided to try out his new dragon with an attack.

“Alright Tapescrew!” he yelled. “Let’s see what you got!” The new and improved Tapescrew appeared to have heard him, for he brought his head back, and opened his mouth wider. As he was doing this, the already dark sky above the stadium started filling up with clouds. Tapescrew gave not a roar, but an ear piercing shriek that forced the entire audience to cover their ears. As soon as the sound left its mouth, there was a clap of lightning, and an explosion of thunder that literally set the clouds ablaze.

“He lit th’ sky on fire!” yelled Hagrid, his voice sounding like a mix of nervousness and excitement. Everyone was looking up at the clouds, which were now floating infernos.

Tapescrew gave another yell, and a fiery blast of lightning came down from the sky, and right in the middle of the stadium. A second later, a flaming tornado appeared right where the lightning had struck. It shot off chunks of fire every time it spun, that flew all over, including right at the audience.

“Kooverta Maximus!” came a voice from right next to Harry. He looked over and saw that there was a full grown wizard right there. His spell shot right up above the stadium, and collided with three other shield spells, coming from each corner of the arena, apparently cast by other wizards. The combined four shields multiplied their power, and an enormous shield formed over the arena, separating it from the audience, just in time to block off the chunks of fire that were flying all over.

"An' thanks ter th' volunteer wizards who I ha' put here in case summat like that happened," said Hagrid. Apparently, he had expected something like that to happen, a dragon to get out of control, or use a too powerful of an attack.

The tornado was now twice its original size, and the sound it was making was deafening. Even though Tapescrew didn't seem to be having any trouble escaping its mighty pulling force, Goyle's dragon looked as though it was using all the strength it had to resist being sucked in. But, not even a dragon can put off the inevitable too long and, when the tornado was about four times its original size, the dragon could resist no longer. With a low yelp, it gave into the amazing force of the tornado, a began spinning around it, faster and faster, until it ended up right in the middle of it, being burned to a crisp.

"Stop th' figh'! Stop th' figh'!" yelled Hagrid, trying to end the contest before Goyle's dragon was killed.

The thunderclouds disappeared, as did the fiery tornado, instantly. All that was left was the awesome new Tapescrew and a pile of ash that had been Goyle's dragon. Tapescrew and the pile of dust were both lowered into the ground, to be stored away.

"Th' winna is Ron Weasley!" bellowed Hagrid, trying not to sound to happy over the death of Goyle's dragon. Ron came bounding back to his seat, looking more excited than Ron or Hermione had ever seen him.

"Did you see him? Wasn't he awesome? Oh man that was great!" he garbled, looking as if he was in a state of excited shock over winning the duel.

"You did great," said Harry, trying to calm him down.

"Oh man, that was- oh... thanks Harry," said Ron, beginning to return to his senses.

"You know, Ron," said Hermione, "you just made history with that last fight. No one's ever seen what an African Abysmall can become with enough training. It's the only dragon in the world that metamorphosizes, and you're the owner of the only adult form of an Abysmall." Ron began to stroke his chin.

"Hmm... I wonder how much I could sell one of them for?" he said, looking dazed. Harry and Hermione laughed, leaving Ron to his dream.

It went on like that for several minutes: Dean fought Parvati, she won of course; and Seamus fought Lavender who he surprisingly defeated. Harry couldn't wait for the next fight to begin. This was the most fun he'd ever had taking a test.

"An' for our nex' match, we'll have... Mr. Seamus Finnigan against... Mr. Ron Weasley! An', Mr. Weasley, please try an' not ter kill th' opposing' dragon this time, okay?"

“Alright Hagrid, I’ll try… but I’m not making any promises!” yelled Ron, who was already in his box, ready to go. His African Abysmall and Seamus’ Welsh Green appeared from beneath the ground, and immediately got at it. This time, Ron’s dragon gave off some sort of mystifying glow, that hypnotized Seamus’ dragon. It wrapped itself around the small Welsh Green, and squeezed it into unconsciousness, ending the battle almost as soon as it had started.

“That was almost too easy,” said Ron when he had arrived back in his seat. “They should really have trained better. My Tapescrew just barely touched him and poof! He was gone.”

Harry began to get nervous. He was probably going to have to face Ron eventually… what if he lost? It would be the first time either of them would have ever directly gone against one another in a contest, and whoever came out the better may be proclaimed greater than the other for the rest of their lives. This could be a bad situation.

“Miss Hermione Granga’ an’ Miss Parvati Patil! Yer up!” said Hagrid when the two dragons had gone back underground. Hermione got up from her seat, and walked over to her box. Everyone was by now used to the rhythm of how a match goes, so the fights were going much faster. Hermione’s Transylvanian Three-Headed Terror and Parvati’s green and red Irish Igniter rose from the ground, and immediately got at it, not even waiting for commands from their owners.

Hermione’s dragon was much larger than Parvati’s, so she had the advantage. Two of its heads went around Parvati’s dragon, and squeezed it, leaving the third head open to begin breathing some flames, which is exactly what it did.

“That’s the way Sacrenfer!” yelled Hermione, jumping up and down. Parvati’s dragon was now covered in flames, and Hermione’s was just squeezing it harder and harder, not making matters any better for Parvati. Within just a few more seconds, the match was over, and Hermione had won. Parvati’s dragon, when Sacrenfer released it, collapsed to the ground, still on fire. The two dragons were brought back underground.

“Now… Mr. Draco Malfoy… and… Miss Hermione Granga’ again!” said Hagrid.

Parvati and Malfoy exchanged places, and Hermione stayed right where she was. Malfoy had an evil smirk on his face that appeared to not make Hermione feel much better, though she looked plenty confident by now.

“It doesn’t matter if he tries to psyche her out or not,” said Ron. “Even if he does win, Hermione will still get the Advanced O.W.L.”

“She will?” asked Harry.

"Well, yeah. Remember? The top five get the Advanced O.W.L. Right now, there's only you, me, Hermione, Malfoy, and Tci left. All five of us are going to get the O.W.L. no matter what."

"Tci gets it even though he hasn't even fought yet?" said Harry, amazed.

"I guess so, he just must be very lucky. But, enough talk. The match is starting!" Harry immediately turned his attention to the arena, where the two dragons were rushing at each other. They were almost the same size, but Malfoy's appeared to be slightly larger. This would not be much of an advantage, though, the dragons were so huge already that a few extra inches wouldn't really matter.

"Just do what you did before Sacrenfer!" yelled Hermione. On command, Sacrenfer put the two heads on the left and right sides down so that they were parallel to the ground, ready to wrap around the opponent. The middle head reared back, powering up a fireball.

"Do it now, Tresmal!" yelled Malfoy. Evidently, he had named his dragon as well. When the words left his mouth, Tresmal immediately stopped right where it was, spun around, so its back was towards Sacrenfer, and exposed all of its deadly spikes. Sacrenfer was going to run right into them.

"No! Stop!" yelled Hermione. But, it was too late. Malfoy had timed it just right, and Sacrenfer ran right into the spiky bed that was Tresmal's back. Each of its three heads let out a giant roar of pain that echoed throughout the entire grounds of Hogwarts and probably all the way into the castle. Sacrenfer had been defeated. Its heads drooped down towards the ground, and its eyes closed.

"I... lost..." said Hermione, who had fallen onto her knees in the box. Tresmal was now shaking its back, trying to get Sacrenfer's body off. With one massive spasm, Sacrenfer's body came flying off, and landed right in front of Hermione's box. She looked at it, burst into tears, and ran away. The two dragons were brought underground, and Malfoy returned to his seat, singing and whistling.

"What's her problem?" asked Ron, pointing at Hermione who was now almost all the way back to the castle. "She knew she was going to get the O.W.L. anyway."

"You know how much she likes to be the best at things, Ron," said Harry. "And losing something this important, that quickly... it must have really gotten to her."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Fer out nex' match!" yelled Hagrid, quite loudly, to take people's attention away from Hermione, "we will have... Mr.... um, Sy? Tci is it? Yes, Mr. Tci an'... Mr. Draco Malfoy!"

Harry groaned. While he would like to see Tci's dragon in action, he wanted to get back into the arena and fight.

The two dragons rose from the ground, and Harry examined Tci's Mongolian Mutilator. It was quite small, only about half the size of Malfoy's Hungarian Horntail. But, it did have one very interesting feature. Instead of having spikes all over, it had several metallic tubes, including two large ones at the top of its head. While they looked next to useless, Harry imagined they must have some special purpose.

Malfoy, who looked quite irritated by having to have fought twice in a row, immediately began ordering his massive dragon.

"Tresmal... just, step on it or something," he said lazily. Evidently, he didn't think Tci's dragon would be much of a problem since it was so small. Tresmal walked up to Tci's dragon, and peered down at it. It raised one giant hand into the air, and started bringing it down right on top of it.

Then, just when it looked as though Tci's dragon was going to be crushed, it put its tubes to work. Huge flames came shooting out of each one, flying miles into the sky. Some of the flames hit Tresmal, causing its hide to light on fire.

"No! Put yourself out Tresmal!" yelled Malfoy, pressed up against the glass side of his box. Tresmal immediacy began whacking the flames with his hands, but it wasn't doing anything, the flames were still spreading.

Tci's dragon then shot another round of fire at Tresmal, this time, perfectly aimed right at it. Any part of the dragon that wasn't on fire before was now. It just looked like one giant inferno. Within seconds, it collapsed onto the ground, defeated.

"NOO!" yelled Malfoy. "How could I lose!?" The two dragons were brought back underground, and Malfoy walked back to his seat, trying not to looked too angry about the outcome of the match. Tci ran after him, trying to shake hands, but Malfoy would have none of it. He just sat down and looked away from his fellow Slytherins.

"Wow," said Ron, "I never thought anything could ever beat Malfoy's dragon. Tci must be an awesome trainer."

"What are you talking about?" said Harry. "You're dragon could beat Tci with its eyes closed."

"I don't know, Harry. Did you see the flames it made? That's was pretty awesome."

Harry had to agree. Tci's dragon was very impressive, he felt sorry for the person that would go against him next.

“A’ight everyone,” said Hagrid. “We’ve on’y got a ‘alf hour left, so we got ter hurry! Th’ nex’ match is... wow, Mr. Tci again... and... Mr. ‘Arry Potter!”

Harry fell back into his seat. Why did he have to say that? He was going to be defeated by Tci... great. He walked up to his box and sighed. Well, he thought to himself, at least now he wouldn’t have to face Ron. The dragons rose from the ground, and Harry felt even less confident when he saw Tci’s dragon. It looked the same as before, but now he knew its hidden power: shooting mile-high flames from its tubes...

Then it hit Harry. He knew how he could win this match!

“Woodworm!” yelled Harry. “Pick up a chunk of the ground!” Woodworm turned around and gave him a confused expression, but did the task anyway. He bent over, and picked up a large piece of earth.

Now... put it in your mouth!” said Harry, trying not to laugh at his own command. Woodworm threw it high into the air, and caught it in its mouth, not daring to swallow it. He looked very funny, like a hamster with its cheeks full of food.

“Spit it out! At the other dragon!” yelled Harry, hoping his plan would work. Wanting to spit it out anyway, Woodworm opened his mouth, and several chunks of flaming dirt came flying out, right at Tci’s dragon.

Just as Harry had planned, the dirt broke into smaller pieces while in the air, and several of those pieces lodged themselves into Tci’s dragon’s tubes. More and more dirt settled inside them, not allowing any fire to come out.

“Ha! I’d like to see you shoot fire now!” yelled Harry. All of its tubes were overflowing with molten dirt, and the dragon was rendered useless. No matter how hard it tried, or how much energy and effort it put into it, no fire would come out.

“Excellent! Now, Woodworm, attack it!” Woodworm ran up to Tci’s dragon, stood there for a second, and then kicked it right in the stomach, making it fly through the air, and hit Tci’s box. Harry saw its eyes roll back, and its body go limp. It fell down to the ground, unconscious. Harry had won, he had beaten Tci’s dragon.

Harry skipped back down to his seat, and sat down next to Ron. After much congratulations from him, they both looked back at Hagrid, who was ready to announce the final match, the one Harry had dreaded even more than his one with Tci.

“Th’ last two competitors, ‘Arry Potter an’ Ron Weasley, are you ready?”

Harry and Ron stared at each other. He had totally forgotten that since he had beaten Tci, he would now have to fight Ron. What he had dreaded the last few minutes, and the entire year, ever since the Dueling Club had started, how now come true. He and Ron, for the first time, would have to go against each other.

## **Chapter 28- Harry's Order**

“Well, good luck,” whispered Harry. Ron just nodded back. The two of them walked up to the arena, taking their positions.

“This should be good,” Harry heard Malfoy snicker. Evidently, he was over his loss, and was eager to cheer against both of them.

“Let’s try an’ keep this a fast match,” said Hagrid. “We’ve on’y got about’ ten minutes left.” The two dragons rose from the ground and faced each other. Harry swallowed hard, and began the fight.

“Alright Woodworm, take him out,” he said quite unenthusiastically. Woodworm ran towards Tapescrew, who was still giving off the golden aura and blue fire. Ron mumbled something, and Tapescrew rose from the ground, flying very high into the air, showing off all of its body.

“Let’s take this battle to the air, Woodworm!” yelled Harry, starting to feel more confident about fighting his friend. Woodworm jumped into the air and rose to the height that Tapescrew was at.

“Shoot some fire Tapescrew, and watch out for its tail!” yelled Harry. TapsecREW was already trying to coil itself around Woodworm.

Woodworm reared back slightly, and let loose a giant ball of fire right at Tapescrew. It was a massive fireball, and it was flying right towards Tapescrew’s face. Harry was getting excited, there was nothing Ron could do to stop it now.

Then, just as the fireball was about to hit its face, something amazing happened. Tapescrew opened its mouth, as if to breath fire, but no fire came out... just water. Hundreds of thousands of gallons came shooting out, right at the flame that was heading for it, immediately putting it out, and reducing it to nothing more than some smoke. Harry just stared, dumbfounded. Whoever heard of a water-breathing dragon?

It was now Tapescrew’s turn to attack. It shot right at Woodworm, at speeds faster than Harry could have imagined. Then, when it looked as thought it were going to collide with Woodworm, something even more amazing happened: it went through Woodworm. Half of it was sticking out of Woodworm’s back, and the other half was sticking out its front. Woodworm, however, didn’t appear to be in any pain; he just closed his eyes, and appeared to have fallen asleep. This was very odd sight, seeing two dragons connected like this, and it brought many gasps from the audience.

Tapescrew then just continued going through Woodworm, until he had passed through him entirely, and was all on one side. This, however, was not good for Woodworm, as he was still asleep. Since he was unconscious in the air, he could do only one thing: fall.

He fell from high in the sky all the way down to the ground, creating a massive explosion sound, along with a small earthquake that shook the entire audience and stadium. Woodworm gave a low, painful growl and stuck his tongue out, indicating that he was done fighting, and that Harry had lost.

“Let’s hear it fer th’ winna... Mr. Ron Weasley an’ his dragon Tapescrew!” yelled Hagrid. The audience erupted into applause as Ron walked back to his seat, bowing and blowing kisses to everyone. Clearly, he was enjoying the attention. Harry tried to feel happy for him, he rarely ever got praise like this... he deserved it.

Harry walked back to his seat, and waited for Ron. He wanted to congratulate him as well. Just as he saw Ron emerging from his throng of admirers, the bell rang, signaling it was time to start their last class of the day. Harry saw Ron disappear back into the group as he headed for his next test. Harry decided he would just congratulate him during their next O.W.L., during Divination.

Harry shuddered. It was time for his Divination O.W.L., and he couldn’t imagine a worse torture than that. He was tired, hungry, his brain felt like mush, and he wouldn’t be the least bit surprised if his hands exploded from cramps. He really didn’t feel like taking another test.

But, he somehow made it to the top of the tower, and climbed into the Divination room. Harry saw that everyone else was already there, including Ron. Harry walked over to his desk, and collapsed into it.

“Hey, great game,” he said to Ron.

“Thanks,” he said back. “I had no clue I was going to win.”

“You deserved it,” said Harry. “Training your dragon, even though it looked like it was never going to be any good. You stuck with it, and you prevailed.”

“Thanks, Harry. You’re a real pal.”

Just then, Professor Trelawney popped into the room, holding a large amount of papers. She immediately began passing them out.

“Now,” she began in her usual, misty voice, “even though I already know the outcome of these tests, and who will and won’t get the O.W.L., I have decided to have you take them anyway... for practice.”

Harry and Ron rolled their eyes.

“And even though I rarely ever choose to speak what I have seen,” she said, looking at Ron and Harry, sounding annoyed, “I must say, you two will not do very well.”

"Hey, she finally made an accurate prediction," whispered Ron to Harry after she had given them their tests. Harry laughed, and began working. Just a few minutes into the exam, his hand began to hurt. He had already done six other tests, just like this, and his hand felt as though it had just run the marathon... twice. Worst of all, all of the questions were short answer; she gave a few occurrences, and you had to write what they meant. Harry knew barely any of them, and guessed on almost them all. He didn't really care if he did or didn't get the O.W.L. anymore, all he wanted was sleep.

However, the sounds of another Advanced Care of Magical Creatures O.W.L. going on outside encouraged Harry to keep going. He wished he was back out there, fighting with his dragon.

Before long, Harry had finished, and passed his test in well before anyone else. They were all trying to put down correct answers, not making stuff up. Ron finished shortly after him, then the rest of the class finished, ending with Lavender and Parvati, who had evidently taken their time.

Professor Trelawney collected the papers and put them away. Harry groaned, it was time for the Advanced O.W.L. test... should he try for it?

"Well, since this is my last class for the day," said Professor Trelawney, "I have decided to end it doing a bit of a more... fun test than I did on my other classes."

Harry heard Ron grunt. Though, he agreed with him. What would Professor Trelawney's idea of fun be? Counting the amount of pellets inside an owl's stomach to see if it would flood next Tuesday? Harry certainly hoped not.

"For the Advanced O.W.L. test," she continued, "I am going to show you all a film. It is up to you to try and predict what will happen next. Now, I am warning you, this is a very random movie, and one that I am sure none of you would have ever seen since it is a Muggle film. So, it is going to be next to impossible to figure out what will happen next unless you are a true Seer." She turned away, and walked into the back of her room. She returned with a genuine Muggle television set, VCR and all. It was on a large stand with wheels, so she easily wheeled it to the front of the class.

"Excuse me, Professor," said Parvati, "but how is that... thing going to work? Electricity doesn't work in the castle."

"I will power it with a bit of my own magic," she said as she popped the tape into the VCR and tapped it with her wand. Immediately, the TV turned on.

"Everyone wishing to participate, please come up close," said Professor Trelawney. Harry sighed, and walked up. It's worth a shot, he thought to himself. Ron came up as well, thinking along the same lines as Harry. Everyone in the class was going to try for it, and they were all huddled around the television set.

“I wonder what movie it could be,” whispered Ron. Harry shrugged. Knowing Professor Trelawney, it was probably some boring documentary or something.

Then, the opening credits began and the music started. Harry’s ears perked, and his attention turned from outside the window to the TV. Could it be? He looked closer at what was currently on, and felt excited all over. He couldn’t believe it... she was showing Monty Python and the Holy Grail!

As soon as the opening credits were over, Harry decided it was time to take action. He could get the O.W.L.! Harry closed his eyes, and pretended to shake all over, as if going into some magnificent trance. He slowly walked up next to the television set, and began mumbling incoherent words. Harry heard excited whispers all around him, everyone was wondering what he was doing.

Then, just when the movie was really starting to begin, Harry opened his eyes, and met the world with a blank stare, trying to look as catatonic as possible. Harry had watched this movie so often with Dudley, he had practically memorized it... and now was the time to recite it.

He began speaking right at the first scene, line for line, word for word, with his head tilted slightly to the side, and speaking in a monotone voice. Everyone in the room gawked at him, amazed at what he was doing, actually believing him. While it wasn’t hard to deliver the words from the movie, pretending to be in a trance and not laugh or smile was. At many points, especially the funny ones, it took all the self-control Harry had to not explode with laughter.

It went on like this for several minutes, Harry doing all of the speaking. Except for a few random and inaccurate shots from Parvati and Lavender, he was the only one to have said anything, and he was by far doing the best job. Even if he stopped now, more than halfway through the movie, he would still get the O.W.L. From the looks Professor Trelawney was giving him, he had done the best of any student she had ever seen.

A half hour later, the movie was over, and Harry’s Advanced O.W.L. was in the bag. The second the movie ended, Harry pretended to snap out of his catatonic phase by giving a sudden spasm. To add to the effect, Harry collapsed on the floor, as if he had just performed some massively taxing feat. Harry couldn’t help but give a small smile as he felt people gather all around him, shaking him and speaking excitedly. To try and avoid any questions they may have about his expression, Harry decided it was time to get up. Harry made a few moans and put his hand to his forehead, acting like he was just coming out of a coma. He had actually pulled it off!

“What was it like Harry?”

“What did you see?”

“Did voices talk to you?”

“Were there any buffalos?”

Many questions were thrown at Harry as they helped him up. Professor Trelawney, however, took him aside. She pushed him up against a wall, and immediately began interrogating him.

“How did you do that Harry?” she asked, sounding amazed. Harry began to feel nervous. Even though Professor Trelawney was not especially good at predicting the future, she probably knew quite a bit about what’s really supposed to happen during a true trance. If he told her he saw or heard something that he wasn’t supposed to, she’d figure out he had faked it.

Then, Harry remembered two years ago, at the end of his third year. Professor Trelawney had gone into a trance, like the one he had faked being in. She had predicted that Wormtail would join forces with Voldemort and resurrect him. Harry remembered that when he questioned her about it afterwards, she didn’t remember any of it. Harry decided to follow the same path.

“Do... do what professor?” said Harry, trying to look utterly confused.

“You went into a trance my boy!” she said. “You recited every line to that movie perfectly! Something must have triggered that state of mind, what was it?”

“I haven’t a clue professor,” said Harry. “All I remember is you putting in the movie, seeing the opening credits come up, and then now... all of you asking me about what happened.”

Professor Trelawney gave him a hard stare, as if she didn’t believe him. She opened her mouth, ready to say something when suddenly, the final bell of the day rang, ending the tests.

“Sorry professor,” said Harry, trying to look innocent, “maybe we can talk about this later. I’ve really go to go.” Harry released himself of her grasp on his shoulder, and shot out of the room with the rest of his classmates. Only Parvati and Lavender questioned Harry anymore, but he managed to throw them off by using the same explanation as he gave Professor Trelawney. Leaving them slightly disappointed, Harry ran up to Ron.

“Oh man, I thought today would never end,” said Harry.

“Me either,” said Ron. There was a few seconds of awkward silence as they walked.

“So how did you do that, Harry?” asked Ron.

“You mean the Divination O.W.L. test?”

“Yeah.” Harry gave a small chuckle.

“That movie we watched, it’s Dudley’s favorite. We watched it so many times over the summer, I couldn’t help but memorize it.”

“So you just faked the entire thing?”

“Yep,” said Harry, sounding quite happy with himself.

“Excellent,” said Ron nodding his head. They reached the door to the Gryffindor common room and entered, finding themselves right in the middle of a giant party. No inch of the room was spared from decorations of all sorts, extremely colorful and intricate. At the center of the room, there was a large table, decked with food all over

“Come and join the fun!” yelled Fred, who now had his arm wrapped around Harry’s neck, dragging him further into the room. Even with everything set out, looking absolutely splendid, the last thing he wanted to do was party... all he wanted to do was collapse into his bed. He ached all over, his mind felt like a dried out sponge, and it took more effort to keep his eyes open than to lift a elephant above his head.

“I’m sorry Fred,” said Harry. “But I really need to just go to sleep.”

“Oh, I know just how you feel,” he said, releasing his grip from his shoulder. “But at least take a few of these with you for later, they’re me and George’s latest creation: Shape Shifting Sweeties, they’re basically what we made before the Mirror Munchies, the things we thought were bad. But, as it turns out, these are even more fun! They make you turn into whatever you’re closest to. Only with these, if you get closer to something else, you change into that thing instead. So, someone could change into several different people in just a few seconds. They’re really cool!”

“Thanks Fred,” said Harry, taking a handful. Then, just when Fred’s full hands got near Harry’s, he flashed a bright yellow all over, and immediately turned into a copy of Harry. Harry caught the candy just in time, because half a second later, he fell over.

“Heh, gotcha Harry,” said what was a second ago, Fred. He extended his arm, and quickly helped him up. “Sorry, but I just had to test it out on someone. I’m not really you, or Fred, I’m George.”

“Oh... that’s, um... okay George,” said Harry confusedly. George smiled and ran off, magically shifting his shape every few seconds. Harry just shook his head and rubbed his eyes. How could these people even think about partying? Almost all of them had just spent the entire day taking the hardest tests of their lives!

Harry used his last ounce of energy to run up the stairs and into his dormitory. Not much to his surprise, he saw that Ron, Seamus and Dean were all asleep. But Neville was nowhere to be seen. Harry remembered that he had been missing since their second O.W.L... where could he have been all that time? Harry, however, did not feel like pondering that question too much at this time, he just quickly changed into his

nightclothes, and collapsed onto his bed. Not too much later, he fell right asleep... dreaming about tomorrow, when he would bring his mom back to life... the thing he had waited all year to do was going to finally arrive.

The next morning at breakfast, Harry didn't remember how long he had been asleep for, or any of the dreams he had. All he remembered was that it felt like it was way too short a time to be asleep. He, along with the rest of the fifth years and seventh years, looked as though they were all zombies, with purple bags under their eyes that reached down to their nose. All of them were anxiously awaiting their O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. tests results from the owls that would be bringing them. It was a very tense moment, one-third of the entire Great Hall was eagerly looking up at the hole where the owls came through, searching for any indication that they were on their way.

"They're coming!" yelled a Ravenclaw seventh year. She jumped up from her chair, and pointed to the hole. Everyone in the room quickly looked up and heard the fluttering of many wings along with several hoots. Suddenly, all of the owls poured into the room and zipped towards their recipients. Hedwig quickly found her way to Harry, and he eagerly ripped open his brown envelope that contained his test results. He saw that everyone around him was doing the same.

"Nice! I got eleven O.W.L.s!" said Ron. "That's much better than Fred or George did, and it's one better than Charlie did!" Harry quickly congratulated Ron, and took out his sheet of grades, he quickly looked it over, and was extremely happy with the results.

"Oh man! I got fourteen O.W.L.s!" he yelled. "All I missed was... oh yeah, the History of Magic Advanced O.W.L. and... the Divination O.W.L. Hah! Look at Professor Trelawney's comment: 'You are the only student I have ever taught who had ever gotten the Advanced O.W.L., but not the Average O.W.L. in my class.'"

"Good job Harry," said Hermione, who was currently glancing over her sheet. Once it appeared as though she was finished, she folded it up nicely and put it neatly back into the envelope.

"How did you do Hermione?" asked Ron.

"Just fine," she said quickly.

"Oh, you couldn't have done that bad."

"I did just fine, Ron."

But, Ron wasn't happy with that answer. He quickly dove for her envelope and tore it open. He ripped out her paper and unfolded it. He read it quickly and when he was finished, his mouth was gaping open and his eyes were huge.

“Hermione...” he choked out, “you got... sixteen O.W.L.s.... That’s a perfect score! Not even Bill or Percy did that well!”

“I guess all that extra studying paid off then,” she said, grabbing her exam results back and stuffing them away into her backpack.

“Hermione...” said Ron, still having the same expression, “you are... you are...”

“A know-it-all? A brain? A-”

“A brilliant witch,” said Ron, totally defying what she thought he was going to say.

“Th- thanks Ron,” she said, with an amazed and happy expression on her face.

Harry then turned his head over to ask Dean and Seamus how they did, when he felt an arm on his shoulder. He looked behind him and saw Mrs. Figg. She wasn’t looking her usual, happy self, she looked quite serious.

“Are you ready, Harry?” she asked. He nodded his head, so did Hermione and Ron. Mrs. Figg opened her eyes wide with fear.

“Harry!” she whispered loudly. “You told them about this!” Harry went red. He forgot all about telling Hermione and Ron about the Order of the Phoenix even though he wasn’t supposed to.

“I’m sorry Mrs. Figg,” said Harry. “But, I couldn’t do anything without them.”

“What things?” she said, squeezing his shoulder tight. “What else have you done that I don’t know about?” Harry remembered again that he hadn’t told her that they were the ones who had rescued Sirius and Lupin from Azkaban. He had just assumed that they had told her they did it... but that was evidently not the case.

“Well... we kind of... rescued Sirius and Lupin....” said Harry. He looked up at Mrs. Figg’s face, expecting to see her breathing fire all over him. What he did see, however, was a happily amazed face.

“You did that? You three!” she said. “I am very impressed Harry! Not even some of the greatest dark wizards in the world could get into Azkaban, but you three fifth-years did it... wow. Harry, you are truly greater than I could have ever thought.”

“Err- thanks,” said Harry, happy to still be alive.

“Anyway, back to what I was saying. We need to leave as soon as possible to perform the ceremony, Harry. Your mother was born at one o’clock in the afternoon, and it is now eleven. Meet me in my office in about an hour, and we’ll get ready to go... all of us.”

“You mean Ron and Hermione too?”

“Yes, especially them... and Sirius and Lupin as well.”

“Why are they coming?” asked Ron.

“More security,” said Mrs. Figg. “Voldemort and his Death Eaters have been very quiet lately... too quiet. We think they may be planning something big, and we’re not sure, but we think it may involve Lily. They may try and take her back the second after we resurrect her, while she’s still weak. We need as much security as possible to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

Harry remembered what Malfoy had said, how his mom was going to be involved in something, but he had no idea what.

“But will we make it back in time to be at the end of school feast?” asked Harry. “If all goes according to plan,” she said, “you will be back with hours to spare.”

“Alright Mrs. Figg,” said Harry, “I’ll see you in an hour.”

“Good luck, Harry,” she said, letting go of his shoulder and walking away.

“What do you think is going to happen, Harry?” asked Hermione.

“I don’t know Hermione, I don’t know.”

It was the fastest hour of Harry’s life. It felt as though only a few seconds had passed between him talking with Mrs. Figg, and where the three of them were now: walking down to her office. The three of them were nervously talking about what to expect, when suddenly, Harry saw Neville walking down the hall.

“Hey Neville!” yelled Harry to him.

“Oh, hi Harry,” he said back.

“Where have you been?” asked Ron. “You missed most of the tests!”

“Oh, I made them all up,” he said.

“You made them up already?” said Harry.

“Yeah, I was in the hospital wing all night. The teachers came in and gave me the tests there.”

“Why were you in the hospital wing?” asked Hermione.

"Oh, well... those spells I used in the Advanced Charms test, they really drained me, I mean almost to the point of death. It was pretty scary."

"What were those spells anyway?" asked Hermione. "I've never heard of them before.... Did you invent them?"

"Um... yeah. Err- I got to go... see you later!" he yelled as he ran off.

"Wow, I can't believe Neville invented those spells," said Hermione. "They looked very advanced, so they probably needed a lot of magical energy to work, and a beginning Inventor like Neville doesn't know enough Arithmancy to create virtual magic and-"

"Okay Hermione, that's enough," said Ron.

"This is certainly a whole new side to Neville that we have never seen," said Harry, watching him run down the hall. "I wonder how many O.W.L.s he got."

"No time for that," said Ron. "We're there." Harry turned around, and saw that they were now at the door to Mrs. Figg's office. Nervously, he opened it, and saw her sitting in her chair behind the desk.

"Where's Sirius and Lupin?" asked Harry.

"They're setting up outside," she said, "and it's time we should go and help them. Come along, follow me." She immediately sprung up, and led them on a short walk from her room to the entrance of the Forbidden Forest. When they got there, Harry heard a very familiar voice.

"Hey Harry!" said Colin Creevey. Harry spun around, and saw that he was flying on a broom, with a Quaffle under his arm.

"What are you doing Colin?" asked Harry.

"Oh, just practicing a little Quidditch," he said, throwing the Quaffle up and down in the air. "Next year, five of the people on the Gryffindor team are going to be gone, and you'll need more players! I figured I should practice a little to get ready for tryouts next year."

"Well, good job then Colin," said Harry. "Good luck and... oh, try not to play around here. It is the FORBIDDEN Forest after all."

"Sure thing Harry," he said, flying away slowly. As much as Harry found Colin to be the most annoying little kid on Earth, there was just something about him that made Harry unable to really dislike him.

The four started walking in the direction that led to the giants, and it wasn't long before they arrived at the ceremonial altar that Sirius and Lupin had just finished setting up the

podium. It was a very intricately carved piece of dark golden wood. Every inch was covered in some sort of design, and there were curving lines at each corner that twisted towards the center of the altar, the spot where the skeleton of Lily Potter laid. Harry glanced at it for only a second, and then turned away. He didn't want to look at it again until it was alive.

"Well you arrived at just the right time," said Sirius, wiping his dirty hands together. "We just finished setting it up, so you don't have to help any."

"Thank you Sirius, Remus," said Mrs. Figg. "Any signs of You-Know-Who yet?"

"Nothing yet," said Lupin. "But that doesn't mean that there's not going to be anything, we still have to be vigilant."

"Yes and we should perform the ceremony as soon as possible," said Mrs. Figg. "It's already twelve-thirty... Harry, would you please step up to the front of the altar."

Harry slowly walked before it, and stood there, not knowing what to do. How was he supposed to perform his Order? Nobody ever told him how to call upon the power of the phoenix.

"Sirius, please release the phoenixes." Sirius reached into a large brown bag that was next to the altar. He opened it up, and pointed his wand inside it. Slowly but surely, he magically brought each both phoenixes out, and placed them in the air above the altar. Once both were in the air, he took his magic spell off of them, and they began circling Harry's mom's skeleton, slinging softly. It was a very serene and tranquil song, that made Harry feel joyous and warm all over.

"Harry," said Mrs. Figg, "now put your arms out, and say: 'Liberate Lily ex inferis.'"

Harry took a deep breath, and did as she said.

"Liberate Lily ex inferis," he whispered. Suddenly, Harry heard the sound a phoenix, but not one of the ones that was already circling. It sounded much farther away... but getting closer, and quickly! Within half a second, another phoenix appeared above the body, and began circling with the other two, singing in perfect harmony with them.

"Say it again, Harry," said Mrs. Figg.

"Liberate Lily ex inferis," said Harry again. The second the words left his mouth, a dim white light flew out from both of his hands, and into the skeleton. The phoenixes above began circling slightly faster as well, and singing louder. Harry let out a small gasp, along with Ron and Hermione.

"Say it again, louder!" said Sirius.

“Liberate Lily ex inferis!” he yelled. A bright white light flew out of his hands this time, and flowed right into the carcass, causing it to jump a little. The phoenix’s song was even louder now, and they were flying faster than before.

“Keep saying it!” yelled Lupin over the phoenixes. Harry repeated the words over and over, louder and louder each time. Now there was a constant flow of pure-white energy going from his palms to his mother’s skeleton. The phoenix’s song was almost deafening as they circled so fast, they were creating a blur in the air.

Still, Harry kept yelling over and over. His hands were beginning to hurt, just a little at first, but then it became almost excruciating. He couldn’t take it anymore, so he let go. He fell backwards onto the hard ground, and the flow of white energy stopped, but the phoenixes continued. The skeleton was now glowing a blinding white, so bright, that everyone had to turn away from it, or cover their eyes. Now the phoenix’s song was so loud, it made Harry’s ears feel like they were going to explode.

“It should be finished any minute now!” yelled Mrs. Figg, even though Harry could still barely hear her. He just kept sitting there on the ground, and watched this amazing sight. The skeleton was now beginning to hover in the air, and it was flying high; it came up right in the middle of the circling phoenixes, and began to spin in the center of them. Any second now, Harry would be reunited with his mother....

Just then, something new appeared: a black mark appeared in the white circle the phoenixes were creating from going so fast. At first it was hardly noticeable, but then it grew to be the size of one third of the circle.

“What’s going on!?” yelled Harry.

“I don’t know!” yelled Sirius back.

The skeleton was now going from a blinding white to a deep black, as was the rest of the circle the phoenixes were making. There was no more white, only black all over.

“Something’s gone wrong!” yelled Lupin. The phoenixes slowed down now, and Harry could make out the individual ones. Slower and slower they went, until finally, Harry saw the problem, and it was more worse than he could possibly imagine.

One of the phoenixes was a black phoenix.

“NO!” yelled Sirius. He jumped up to try and get the black phoenix away, but it was too high. He grabbed his wand, and started shooting at it, but every spell was just deflected away. The phoenixes were going incredibly slow now, but the skeleton was not slowing down; it was just a large swirling black mass. It began shooting off black beams of light in every direction, until the entire section of the forest was nothing more than a completely dark area.

Harry heard an explosion, and everything became white for just a second. He covered his eyes, and then looked up at where the skeleton had been. The two normal phoenixes were now lying on the ground, unconscious or dead, Harry couldn't tell. The black one, however, was still flying, next to what had previously been a skeleton. Harry looked up, and saw what was now there. He heard a dark laugh, and before he even saw who it was, he knew it was Lord Voldemort.

## **Chapter 29- Voldemort's Story**

At first, no one said anything. Everyone was staring at Voldemort, and he was looking at all of them, straightening his sleeves. His snake-like face looked even more twisted than ever, his eyes were the size of tennis balls, his nose was no more than two single slits, and his mouth was the same, only horizontal instead. His hands were even more grotesque: his palms were now no more than spheres, and his fingers were just long and thin sticks popping out from it. He turned his attention over to Harry now, and gave a tiny smile.

“Hello... Harry Potter,” he said in that snake-like voice of his. He immediately shot out three blue rings from his wand that went around Harry, Ron and Hermione, and forced them to the ground. No matter how hard Harry struggled, he couldn’t get free of it.

Voldemort was staring at his wand as if it were something he’d never seen before.

“Amazing...” he hissed.

“You get away from them!” yelled Sirius. He took out his wand, and pointed it at Voldemort.

“Avada Kedavra!” he yelled. The familiar green beam of light shot out of his wand, right at Voldemort. Voldemort, however, didn’t even flinch. He just stuck out his arm in the direction of the beam, which immediately stopped right where it was. He clenched his fingers together, and the beam melted into one, small green sphere that disappeared quickly. Voldemort glowed green for an instant, and then he turned his attention back to Harry.

“Well what do you know,” he said. “It worked!” Still looking at Harry, he pointed a single finger at Sirius, and he gave a giant yell of pain. Sirius fell backwards onto the ground, appearing to be unconscious.

“Amazing, my spells work!” said Voldemort, looking happier than Harry had ever seen him. He turned towards Mrs. Figg now, looking ready to try out another one of his spells. Mrs. Figg, however, did not look intimidated.

“Ah, Arabella... I thought we would never meet again,” he said.

“Tom, I see you’ve grown...” she said, looking disgusted.

“You know each other!?” yelled Harry.

“Sadly, I taught him,” said Mrs. Figg. “I was the Arithmancy teacher at that time, one of his favorite classes.”

“She taught me everything I know,” said Voldemort.

“I taught you nothing!” she said. “Just as a father may disown his son even though he had him, I disown the teaching I gave you.”

“How touching,” he said. “In fact, it has affected me so much, I think I will give you a chance to live.”

“Who said anything about me dying?” said Mrs. Figg.

“We shall have a proper duel, one on one with a second each. You and Lupin shall be a team against me and my partner.”

“And who is your partner going to be?”

Just then, the black phoenix landed down on the ground next to Voldemort. It curled up, making itself as small as possible, then it immediately transformed into a human, but not just any human, it was Wormtail.

“I shall be Wormtail’s second, he has not had the chance to fight much lately, and wants a chance to.”

Millions of questions were forming inside Harry’s head. What was going on? How could Wormtail transform into both a rat and a phoenix? What are the new spells that Voldemort was using? And most importantly, how had he gotten here in the first place?

“Fine,” said Mrs. Figg. “Lupin shall be my second against Wormtail and you.”

“Excellent,” hissed Voldemort. “But, to make this a bit more interesting... we shall put a bit more than our lives on the line for this duel.”

“What do you mean?” asked Mrs. Figg.

“Whoever wins this duel will own Harry Potter and his two friends.”

“No! That’s madness! That is crazy! Leave them out of this Tom!”

“Would you rather I kill all of you now then? Or just merely kill you and take the three of them now? At least this way, you have a chance at them...” Mrs. Figg was breathing hard, she kept looking back and forth, between Voldemort and Harry. Finally, she hung her head down, and nodded.

“Alright,” she said.

“Then let the duel begin!” yelled Voldemort. Wormtail stepped forward, and brandished his wand, just like Harry had seen done many times before at the Dueling Club.

“Avada Kedavra!” yelled Mrs. Figg. The green beam shot out.

“Porcini Magus!” yelled Wormtail. A pinkish beam came out of his wand, and met in midair with Mrs. Figg’s. The two spells fought for domination over the other, but within seconds, the stronger one came out on top.

The entire beam turned a pink color, and the spell hit Mrs. Figg. She turned a dark pink all over, and quickly transformed into a pig. Her wand fell down to the ground, and she ran away, oinking as she went along.

“Well that was easy,” said Wormtail. “I expected more of a challenge than that!”

“Prepare to get one then!” yelled Lupin, jumping into the spot where Mrs. Figg had been. He stood there, waiting for Wormtail to make the first move.

“Come on Peter, my old friend, make your move!” growled Lupin. Wormtail, however, dropped his hand to the side. He turned his head around to look at Harry.

“Harry Potter,” he said, “Did you ever wonder why the Homorphus Charm was never used on Lupin, the spell that can change werewolves back into humans, the spell that Lockhart supposedly used on many?”

That made Harry think. Why didn’t they just simply transform him back into a human? It would have been simpler than having to take that potion every month like he did in Harry’s third year, and it would have saved him many problems as a child.

“I’ll take your silence as a no,” said Wormtail. “Remus here was never made human again because the Ministry of Magic loves werewolves. They are superior to normal wizards because they are nearly invincible. Almost every spell, including the killing curses, do not work on them. I could pelt old Remus here with every spell I know, and I doubt if he’d so much as flinch.”

“So then what are you going to do?” said Harry, feeling hopeful that Lupin may win the duel.

Wormtail didn’t answer him, however. He just stuck out his silver arm at Lupin and smiled. What was he up to?

“Silverargent!” he yelled. A silvery beam shot out from his wand, and hit Lupin right in the chest. It knocked the wind out of him, and he fell over backwards, landing on the ground, just like Sirius did.

“No! You beat him!” yelled Harry.

“Remember how I said ALMOST every spell does not work on werewolves? Well, one of them that does is the Silver Spell, one that can only be conjured from a silvery object. It kills them instantly... your friend is dead Harry Potter.”

“You... killed... Lupin?” asked Harry, not wanting to believe it.

“I’m afraid so Mr. Potter,” said Voldemort. “And with his death, you belong to me.”

“Never, I will never join you!” yelled Harry.

“I don’t think you understand,” said Voldemort. “You see, you have absolutely no choice in the matter, it is not a voluntary thing.”

“The second you release me, I’ll get Ron or Hermione to kill me. That way, I won’t have to join you,” spat Harry. Voldemort almost looked hurt by this statement.

“Harry, how come you don’t want to join me? I am the most powerful wizard in the world, I have the greatest army in the world, and with your help, we can own the entire world! Why won’t you join me?”

“Because you killed my parents,” said Harry quickly. Voldemort sighed.

“Yes, sadly I did,” said Voldemort, almost sounding guilty. “But, your mother didn’t have to die, that was her own fault.”

“You keep saying that,” said Harry, being curious. “Why didn’t she have to die?”

“Harry!” said Voldemort, sounding appalled. “You don’t think, as powerful as I am, that I would still want to kill my own daughter, do you?”

That statement made Harry’s mind feel like it was going to explode. His mother was Voldemort’s daughter? No, there’s no way that could possibly be!

“No, you can’t be her father... it’s-”

“Impossible?” said Voldemort. “Well, that’s what everyone in the wizarding world thinks, except for you and me.”

“But how... how could you be her father? That just can’t be! Her father was a Muggle. I don’t know much about them, but I certainly know that the father was not a dark wizard!”

“Harry, your simple mind angers me,” said Voldemort. “Of course the father that raised her was not me, it was someone else, whose name I do not even know. But, the father who’s DNA she has half of is indeed mine, I can guarantee you.”

“But how?” asked Harry, feeling as though he were on the verge of tears.

“Ah, Harry, that day was one that shall stay in my mind for all eternity. I was young, around the age of what... forty something I think, and I was just getting ready to start my reign of terror. Ahh, those were the days Harry... those were the days.... Staying up late

with friends, making plans on how we were going to take over the world, many of which I used later.... It was a grand time.

“One night, after an especially large party, I stumbled out into the street as drunk as a donkey. I also had a bundle of magical flowers with me, given to me from the various women at the party; I was especially popular with that crowd in those days.

“I came upon a house, and saw a couple on the front porch. I saw them arguing and yelling at each other, and eventually the wife went inside and slammed the door while the husband just walked off in the opposite direction.

“I wanted to make sure that my transfiguration skills were up to par, so I quickly transformed myself into the man I had seen walk away. After my success, in morphing, I decided to see how I looked to others, to be one-hundred percent sure that I had it down perfectly. So, I walked up to the house I had seen him storm away from, and rang the doorbell. The woman I had seen before came to the door, and she saw the magical flowers I had in my hand. She immediately took them away from me and sniffed them deeply. She said something like, ‘Let’s never argue again’, and she ran inside with me.

“The next morning I woke up, fully conscious again. I was horrified at what I had done, and ran away back to my hideout. Nine months later, I found out that that woman had given birth to twins, Lily and Petunia. I also found out that one of them, Lily of course, was magical. She became the heir of Slytherin.”

“My mom is not the heir of Slytherin!” yelled Harry.

“Harry, why do you think your mother had a basilisk watch?” asked Voldemort.

“I... I-”

“Yes, exactly. The basilisk is their symbol of Slytherin, everything that it stands for! Destroying whatever is on your path in order to reach your goal! The basilisk personifies that by turning everything in its path into stone, until it finally reaches its destination.”

“But how did she get it?”

“To answer that, I must return to my story. Back then, I was weak, and was hit with pangs of guilt. Wanting the best for my magical daughter, I sent her The Standard Book of Spells Collection, years first through seventh, and the basilisk watch, to show her who she really was! By the time she had gotten her Hogwarts letter of acceptance, she knew many spells that some of the graduating seventh years didn’t even know. So, she became one of the best students Hogwarts has ever had.”

Harry’s brain had never had such an overwhelming amount of information put in it at once. He felt like his brain was going to detonate, and he just wanted to try and forget everything he had just heard... but he couldn’t.

“But why did you attack in the first place?” asked Harry. He might as well try and take advantage of this opportunity, Voldemort was pouring out more information to him than he had ever. Before he died, he wanted to know everything.

“You mean why did I attack your parents, Harry?”

“Yes.”

“Well, to get the answer to that, you must first go back to where I left off on my last tale. Your mother had just gotten accepted to Hogwarts, and I had gotten word of that through my sources. I was just about ready to start on my campaign, so I needed all the help I could get. I saw my daughter, that no one except me knew was my daughter, as an excellent advantage to me.

“So, I visited her one day, disguised as a friend of hers. When we were out of sight of her parents, I transformed back into my normal form, and told her that I was the one who had made sure she was accepted to Hogwarts. And, in return for doing that, I wanted her to do something for me. I told her that she had to find a man named James Potter, who I knew was the heir of Gryffindor, marry him, and have a child. Since I told her she had to do this or else I would make sure she didn’t get into Hogwarts, she quickly agreed and ran home, becoming a Death Eater from then on.

“My plan was simple: get the most recent heir of Slytherin, Lily, to have a child with the most recent heir of Gryffindor: James. Their child would become the heir of the father’s house, Gryffindor. Since I am extremely knowledgeable in the field of this study, I knew that only way to completely destroy a bloodline was to destroy two generations of it at once. I would kill James, then you, and then Gryffindor would be no more. All of its magical spirit would be drained, and it would be no more than a house at Hogwarts, much like a person after his or her soul has been taken: no more than a shell. With Gryffindor gone, Slytherin could easily take over the other two, and turn Hogwarts into a school for the Dark Arts.

“But, my plan failed in so many ways. I knew that Lily would be attracted to James, yes, but I had no clue she would actually fall in love with him, and care more for him than her own life. When you were born, I reminded her of her promise, but she did not care anymore. She was no longer a child, and I underestimated her. But, I had to destroy Gryffindor anyway. I barged into their house, and immediately killed James. I moved in on you, but your mother wouldn’t have it. I told her to stand aside, and she would live, but she cared for you just as much as James. Alas, I had no choice. I killed her, than went for you... and you know the rest. If I had just bided my time, waited for you grow up and your mother to die on her own, I could have accomplished my goal without being delayed.”

“So then why did you want to still kill me afterwards?” asked Harry. “Years later, why should you inconvenience yourself anymore?”

“I did not care if you died or not from then on, Harry,” said Voldemort. “It just so happened that you were poking around in every one of my plans to become what I am today. It has just been recently that I have decided you would be more valuable to me as an ally rather than dead.”

“So that’s what you’ve been trying to do all year. It certainly took you many tries to finally get me.”

“Yes, my unofficial motto is: ‘Always have a backup plan, or three.’ Every time you foiled one of my ideas this year, I had another one ready to go. After Wormtail’s failed attack on you at the Dursley’s residence, I had him set a trap for you on the way to Azkaban, which I told him not to really concentrate on since it wasn’t even that good of an idea, I was ready with another plan waiting for you at the prison. When you beat Wormtail at Azkaban, I tried again by having him steal Lily’s skeleton and lure you out here. When that one failed as well, he tried again at the Yule Ball. Even when that one didn’t work, I did not give up hope, since all the time after Wormtail stole Lily’s carcass, I have had another plan that would definitely work.”

“And which one was that?”

“The one that you have just seen, Harry,” said Voldemort. “I made Wormtail into a Polymagus, how I did that, you shall find out if you join me, and be able to become both a regular phoenix, and a black phoenix. He has been the one following you around, trying to get you, and he was also one of the birds used in the resurrection. If my other plans failed, and it came down to this one, he was to force the two other phoenixes to channel their energy to Lily’s skull, where I have been secretly hiding for the past several months. All of their magic would go into me, and make me more powerful than I have ever been, allowing me to utilize many of the spells I have just invented that require more magical energy than is usually possible.

“The spell I used on Sirius, the spell on used on you, the Magus Morpher, and the Sight Spell, and many more are all my own inventions. I have hundreds more ready to go as well.”

“The Magus Morpher? The Sight Spell?” said Harry. “Which ones are those?”

“Those were my first new spells,” said Voldemort. “They do not require any more magical power than I already had, but they are extremely useful anyway. The Magus Morpher allows an Animagus to see the human form of another Animagus, and the Sight Spell allows other people to see what someone else sees.”

Suddenly, it all became clear to Harry.

“So, the combination of those two spells is what you used to make every see Sirius in Diagon Alley,” said Harry. “Wormtail used to Magus Morpher on him, and then you used

the Sight Spell on him. Everyone saw through Wormtail's eyes that the dog was actually Sirius." Voldemort clapped his hands.

"Very good, Harry," he said. "You are quite good. However, you were not good enough to detect this trap, or to figure out the other two which I have planned, just in case this one happens to fail."

"You mean, you have even more backup plans?" said Harry, amazed at how far ahead Voldemort planned.

"Ah yes," he hissed. "I cannot tell you much about them, you know, but I can tell you that one of them has to do with your magical cousin."

"Magical cousin? But, my only cousin is Dudley!"

"Yes, that's him... Dudley," said Voldemort. "We were going to force him to kill you. He could have been a very powerful wizard, all he needed was a little training and his powers could have rivaled mine."

"No, there has to be some mistake," said Harry. "Dudley? A wizard? No way! The Dursleys hate all magic! There's no possible way Dudley could be a wizard!"

"And yet, there has to be, because he is.... Harry, when you were left at the Dursleys, there was a note in the basket you were in. It told the Dursleys about you, about what happened, and about me.... I am the reason they were so cruel to you! The only reason they mistreated you was to try and 'beat' the magic out of you, so that you would grow up leading a normal life, and would never have to deal with me. They wanted the best for you, Harry, but could never show it or else you may get your powers back that they had been trying to force out of you.

"As for Dudley being a wizard, I can assure you, he is. Remember, your mother and Petunia were twins, so they both had the same magical potential. Lily, however, was the one I decided to help, so when the time came for Hogwarts to choose who the newest students were going to be, Lily was on the list, and Petunia wasn't, even though they both could do magic.

"Despite the fact that she didn't get chosen for Hogwarts, that didn't mean she lost her magic. When she had Dudley, he got her magical DNA, and he is a wizard. Not wanting you to have the Kinsafe Charm's protection available to you at Hogwarts by having Dudley around you all the time, I made sure that his name was not down for Hogwarts, and that he never got a letter. And, since he hasn't used magic his entire life, he is extremely ripe and ready to be picked, and can become very powerful. But, I'm sure you know about that magical theory."

"No... I don't..." whispered Harry, amazed at what Voldemort was telling him. The Dursleys had actually been trying to help Harry all of that time, Petunia hated Lily

because she got accepted to Hogwarts and she didn't, and Dudley was a wizard... it was all almost too much.

"What are they teaching you at that school of yours these days!?" yelled Voldemort.  
"Well, Harry, the first spell a wizard uses with his or her permanent wand determines the average power he or she will have for the rest of his or her life, and the longer a wizard waits before using a wand, the more powerful his or her first spell will be. So, Dudley can be a very powerful wizard, he has an extra five years of no magic on his side."

"Do they, that is... the Dursleys... know that Dudley is a wizard?" asked Harry.

"Oh no," said Voldemort. "Whenever a magical student, Petunia in this case, is not accepted to any magical school, their memories of their magical powers are erased. Petunia forgot that she ever had any magical powers, and they forbade her parents to ever tell her that she ever had any."

"But, if she doesn't remember any of her magical powers, then why does she still hate my mom? Shouldn't she have forgotten about not being accepted to Hogwarts?"

"Oh, that... well, actually, that is a whole other story. You see, even though your mother's parents were forbidden to tell Petunia that she ever had magical powers, there was nothing stopping them from reminding her the Lily had them. She was very well aware that Lily was a witch, and in fact, in her youth, she enjoyed seeing her sister perform magical tricks before she was sent off to Hogwarts."

"Then why does she hate her?"

"That happened many years later, just two years before you were born, Harry. You see, Petunia and Lily's mother got sick, she got... oh, what is the Muggle word for it... ah! Cancer, yes, that's it."

"How did that make her stop liking her?"

"I was getting to that!" snapped Voldemort, getting out of, for an instant, his newfound kind demeanor. However, he quickly put his fake smile back on. "Well, Petunia knew Lily was a witch, so, she asked her if she could cure their mother by transfiguring the cancer cells, transporting them outside of the body, or by just making them disappear. As expected, your mother refused."

"Why did she do that?"

"Well, do one, she couldn't physically do it. Wand laws have been bouncing all over the place ever since magic was discovered, Harry, and it just so happened, that at that time, non-graduate wizards weren't even allowed to take their wands home during the holidays. Since her mother got sick during the summer holidays, she'd have to somehow go back to Hogwarts and steal her wand from the secure vault they were all kept in. First

of all, she would have to find the school, and since it is not on any map, and the Hogwarts train does not even exist out of school season, it would be next to impossible to find.

“Then, if she somehow found the school, she would have to break into it, and steal her wand from the wizard guards. Even if she managed to do THAT without using any magic, she would still have to return to the Muggle world, and perform the magic that she barely knew how to do. The second the spell came out of her wand, the Ministry of Magic would be on her faster than a... a...”

“A cannibal on a missionary?” suggested Harry lazily. Voldemort sighed.

“Well, it will have to do. Anyway, she would be expelled for sure. So, naturally, she had to refuse. Once she told her sister that, she practically disowned her, and hated her from then on. Since she left before Lily could explain, she just figured that she thought she was superior to the rest of her family since she was a witch.”

“How do you know all this?” exclaimed Harry.

“Well, I do have sources... everywhere Harry. Even when I was nothing more than a ghost, I still had my non-human sources constantly feeding me information. But, mostly, I got it all from just asking your mother. After all, it wasn’t until after she married your father that she realized who I really was, and didn’t talk to me anymore.”

“You said you had another backup plan,” said Harry. “What is that?”

“Oh, I cannot tell you that, Harry,” said Voldemort. “For even with my most brilliant plans, there is a chance something could go wrong, and I don’t want my other plan to have been in vain, now do I?”

“I suppose not,” said Harry, shaking his head, and trying to comprehend all that he had been told. But suddenly, it was all coming together for Harry! The new spells Voldemort had invented! Neville using the spells that no one had ever heard of! His mysterious invisible book!

“I know your backup plan....” grinned Harry.

“Oh really now?” asked Voldemort, looking quite impressed.

“Yes,” said Harry. “If all else fails, you’re going to have Neville kill me!” Voldemort let out a laugh that was so loud, the birds in the trees flew away.

“Neville!? Ha ha ha ha!” laughed Voldemort. “That boy can do nothing.”

“He showed off some of your more impressive spells at the Advanced O.W.L. test for Charms,” said Harry. “The Impaling Curse, the Inferno Curse, and more.”

“I know that,” said Voldemort. “But just because he can say the magic words doesn’t mean he knows how to use the spells properly.”

“So he is a Death Eater!”

“Yes....” said Voldemort. “He joined the day of the Yule Ball. It was almost pathetic, seeing him beg me to let him join our Order.”

“But he said he was at the Hogsmeade party.”

“That was just his alibi,” said Voldemort. “That day is when he got his book, and he has been reading it every day. However, it appears his reading comprehension is not very good. It says in there that most of the spells require more magical energy than most wizards can provide. That is why I am not using them on you right now, I don’t want to drain my energy too quickly.”

“So that’s why he had to go to the Hospital Wing,” said Harry. “He must have used more magical energy than he had.”

“Exactly...” said Voldemort. “But, as ingenious as it was for you to figure that out, Harry, that is not my other backup plan... but thanks for the idea.”

“Master,” said Wormtail, “it is time to go.”

“Very well then,” said Voldemort. He pointed his wand at Harry and muttered something. The spell that had been holding him there disappeared, and Harry stood up. He looked behind him, and saw Hermione. She looked just as shaken as he did. Harry looked over on his other side, and expected to see Ron, but he was not there. Harry tried not to show any expression of surprise because of not seeing Ron there; if there was any chance of escape, he didn’t want to screw it up.

“But, before we go, I just want to make an act to show my good faith, Harry,” said Voldemort. “To show you that we are on the same side, and that I have no desire to kill you, I shall make you into a Polymagus.”

“You... you will?” said Harry, surprised.

“Of course,” said Voldemort. “Harry, I am only destructive toward my enemies, but to my allies, I am a god.”

“Then what are you waiting for?” said Harry, wanting to see where this was going. Maybe, if this worked and he got away, he could be even more than a competition to Malfoy. If it worked, he would have nothing over him anymore.

“Very well, first, I shall put a Shield Spell on you,” said Voldemort, waving his wand, and making a glossy beam come out and flow all over Harry. It felt like water, only much harder and stronger.

“And next, the Killing Curse. It will not kill you, however. The shield shall act as your mother’s sacrifice did. However, this time, I shall be prepared for the spell’s deflection. When I use the curse, I shall transfer a bit of myself into you, forever connecting yourself with me. From there, while you are only an inch from death, I will bring you back to my hideout where we will perform the rest of the process.”

“No!” yelled Harry, trying to run away. But, the shield made his feet feel heavier than stone. It was impossible to move. How could he have let himself be drawn into this trap? Did he really want power so much that he has willing to get it from Voldemort? Why didn’t he question it more?

Harry saw Wormtail walk up to Voldemort and whisper something to him.

“A third one? What do you mean he’s missing? Arg, Wormtail, I don’t have time for this, we shall find him later! Avada Kedavra!” yelled Voldemort. The green beam flew out of his wand, and right towards Harry. He closed his eyes.

“NOO!” came a voice from the bushes. Harry opened his eyes, hoping it wasn’t Ron giving himself away. Who he saw amazed him. It was Colin Creevey.

He ran as fast as he could, and reached the Killing Curse’s beam just before it hit Harry. His eyes rolled back into his head, and some blood poured out from his mouth. He hit the ground hard, and Harry knew he was dead.

“Colin… you saved me…” said Harry, crying. He couldn’t believe it. The boy who he had always tried to shove off out of the way, the one who had exalted him, the one who thought he was the greatest, who was a god, sacrificed his life so that he could live. It was enough to make anyone cry.

“Well, I think I just killed the third one,” said Voldemort, looking down at Colin’s body. “Idiotic boy, he should have known I would just do it again… he cannot stop me.” “But, he does deserve some recognition. While stupid, it was a very brave act,” said Voldemort, bending down to Colin’s corpse, and took out his wand. He muttered something, and a hole formed next to Colin. He was going to bury him.

This would be a perfect time to do something, thought Harry to himself, while Voldemort was distracted. If only he could somehow talk to Ron… but he remembered that he could! Malfoy said that all Animagi are connected telepathically… he had to try it.

“Ron! Ron! RON! Can you hear me! RON!” yelled Harry in his head, trying to somehow direct his thoughts… Ron had to hear him, it was the only way.

“Harry? HARRY? Is that you?” came a voice in Harry’s head. It was Ron!

“Ron,” thought Harry, “where are you?”

“I’m right next to Colin’s body, I’m camouflaged as a chameleon,” thought Ron.

“Okay, good,” thought Harry. “Ron, in my pocket there are some candies that Fred and George made. Get one of them out... quickly!”

Harry felt Ron climbing up him, even though he couldn’t see him. He felt his long tongue squirm down into his pocket, and grab hold of one of candies.

“Now what,” thought Ron.

“Climb up that tree over there, the one right above Voldemort. Hurry! He’s putting him in the ground right now, we don’t have much time!”

“Alright, alright!”

Harry waited, as every second went by, more and more sweat dripped down his forehead. This had to work, it just had to!

“Okay, I’m in the tree,” thought Ron.

“Now, you have to do this perfectly Ron. I need you to drop down onto Voldemort’s face, and shove the candy into his mouth.”

“Alright Harry,” thought Ron. He sounded scared, more than he had ever been in his life. Harry had forgotten something important. While he had been around Voldemort many times before, this was the first time Ron or Hermione had even seen him. He was impressed by how they were holding up.

“Here I go!” Ron thought loudly.

“The poor, poor boy,” hissed Voldemort. “See Harry? Deep down, I am just as merciful and decent as your beloved Dumbledore. I honor my allies, and since this was a friend of yours... Ron I think his name was... he deserves to be- AHH!”

Ron had evidently landed on Voldemort’s face. Harry saw him jump up from his crouched position, and randomly grab all over his face, trying to peel off whatever was there. Harry saw Ron’s invisible reptilian arm holding the single Shape Shifting Sweetie. He saw it being forced into Voldemort’s slit of a mouth. Instantly, it went in, and Voldemort gripped his neck, trying not to choke on it. It slid right down his thin neck.

“That’s for killing Sirius and Colin!” yelled Harry, still magically frozen in place.

“What is this!?” choked Voldemort, still gripping his neck. He fell to his knees on the ground, and Wormtail was furiously trying every spell he knew on his master to try and cure him. Voldemort flashed a bright white all over for just a second, and then he turned into a copy of...

“Ron!” yelled Harry. He had just transformed back into his human self, and was standing next to a copy of himself, what Voldemort had become.

“What have you done!” cried Voldemort in Ron’s voice. “Wormtail! Get them for this! This body is far to weak to do any magic in!” He fled away, and quickly disappeared into the forest.

“With pleasure master!” cried Wormtail, rolling up his sleeves. He took out his wand, and pointed it right at Harry. He gave him a look that said he was going to do something nasty.

“Fourmi Magus!” he yelled. Harry closed his eyes shut as the beam flew at him, he felt it hit him, and he opened them, to see what he had become.

Then, to his surprise, the orange beam bounced right off of him. It reflected, just like a mirror, right back at Wormtail. He let out a giant moan, and turned orange all over. Seconds later, he was just a tiny ant, no bigger than a crumb of bread. Harry thought he saw him run away, but couldn’t be sure; he was so small. Ron and Hermione ran over to Harry.

“What did you do, Harry?” asked Ron.

“I’m not sure,” he said. “But I think it had something to do with the fact that I saved that worm’s life two years ago. Maybe its like when someone sacrifices their life for you, and they give you a protection. If I let him live, maybe it gave me some sort of protection against him attacking me.”

“We don’t have time to discuss it now,” sad Hermione. It was the first thing she’d said for almost an hour, and she sounding exhausted. “We have to go back to Hogwarts and tell Dumbledore what happened.”

“Um, aren’t you forgetting something?” asked Harry.

“No, what?” said Ron.

“I’m frozen here!” yelled Harry. Ron and Hermione had forgotten that Voldemort had put that Shield Spell on Harry in the excitement of the moment.

“Oh man, why did you have to agree to that, Harry?” said Hermione, desperately shooting random counter curses on Harry. None of them were working, though. That shield was one of Voldemort’s new spells.

“He would have done it anyway,” said Harry, trying to reassure himself from his actions. How could he have been so stupid?

“Oh... none of these are working!” yelled Hermione, desperately flailing her wand in the air. “This spell is practically unbreakable! Probably only You-Know-Who-”

“Please, Hermione,” said Harry, “you’ve seen him now, you can call him by his name. Okay?”

“The counter curse is probably one of his new spells as well. Probably only V- Vol... Voldemort would know how to break this shield.”

“Yeah,” said Ron, “either him or Dumbledore.”

“Did someone say my name?” came a voice from far away. It had an enchanting effect over everyone, it seemed to flow all over them, not just through their ears. It reached inside them, and brought out hope and joy.

“Professor Dumbledore!” yelled the three of them at once, turning their heads in the direction they heard the voice come from. Sure enough, the tall, blue-cloaked, long bearded fellow popped into view from the bushes.

“We have to get out of here,” he said in a very non-imperative voice, as if what he said was important, but not necessarily the top priority.

“Professor Dumbledore,” squeaked Hermione, “how did you? I mean... how are you... here?” Dumbledore came slightly closer, but still stayed in the bushes, as if he was keeping watch for Voldemort to return any second.

“Ah, well... I was in my office about an hour ago,” he said, “when I turned my attention towards my phoenix, Fawkes. While I had been noticing for the past few months that his brightness has been going down, along with his beauty, today he looked absolutely horrid. He was a deep green and gray all over, and he was melting and flaking off in certain places. I knew that could be the result of only one thing: a clone that has used up all of its energy.”

Harry swallowed hard. So, Dumbledore knew that someone had copied Fawkes, and he had already suspected Harry. That, along with being in the Forbidden Forest, would surely be enough to get him expelled... and then some.

“Well, there is a very simple spell that can show the user where the original of a clone is...”

“I wish we’d known that one when we were trying to convince our clones we were the real ones,” whispered Ron loudly to himself.

"-so I used it, and sure enough, it led me here. I heard screaming, and I knew that only one person could be responsible for this: Voldemort."

"Well, you got it Professor," said Harry. "But, can you please help us out of here? I mean, we'd rather be expelled alive instead of dead."

"Some of us anyway..." whispered Hermione to herself. All Dumbledore did was laugh.

"Harry, come now, you don't really think I could possibly expel you, now do you? Few wizards have even met with Voldemort once and lived to tell about it. But you, you have met with him... what is it now... five times... and each time, you have come out of it alive and well. You are far too good a wizard for our side to lose!"

"What about Ron and Hermione? Will they be in trouble?"

"Oh, I'm sure they will be fine as well," chuckled Dumbledore. "But come now, we must leave quickly! Voldemort could return any minute."

"Um, professor," said Harry, "I am a little... stuck here..."

"Oops!" said Dumbledore, "Sorry there Harry!" He pointed his wand right at Harry, mumbled something, and three bright spheres came out. They revolved around Harry for a few seconds, each time making the shield around him dimmer and dimmer, until finally, it was gone. The three spheres went back inside Dumbledore's wand.

"Now come quickly," said Dumbledore, "we have to be fast! Oh, and don't worry about Lupin and Sirius, I'll get them." He picked them up, and slung them over his shoulder, then signaled to Harry, Ron, and Hermione to follow him. He dashed ahead quickly, appearing to hover rather than run. Harry, who hadn't walked for more than an hour, rubbed his legs, and ran right after him, throwing away the leaves and brushes that got in his way. As fast as he went, though, he was no match for Dumbledore.

"Professor Dumbledore!" yelled Harry. "Please slow down! I can barely see you or keep up with you!" Harry waited for Dumbledore's response, and heard some faint words, but could not make out any of them. Still, he continued running forward.

"Why is he going so fast!?" yelled Ron, quickly avoiding a large stump.

"I don't know," said Hermione, trying to catch up with them. "Arg! For once I wish I had a broomstick!"

"Don't worry," said Harry, "I can see the end of the forest just ahead!" He pointed forward, and indicated a single beam of light flowing into the forest. Harry sprinted now, feeling that Voldemort was all around him, just waiting for him to slow down.

Seconds later, Harry reached the end of the forest, quickly followed by Ron and Hermione. They exited it, out of breath and panting. When he had caught his breath, Harry stood up, and looked around.

Where were they? This wasn't the way they came in! Where was Hagrid's hut? All that was around them was just more green grass, like a giant meadow. Most importantly, where was Dumbledore?

"Professor Dumbledore!" yelled Harry, cupping his hands over his mouth.

"I'm right here, Harry," whispered Dumbledore. He was leaning up against a single tree that was right next to the outskirts of the forest. He didn't look his usual self. He had one foot up against the tree, and was cleaning his fingernails. Lupin and Sirius lay there, on the ground next to him. But that didn't matter right now, they just had to get out of here.

"Professor, we have to go!" said Harry. Dumbledore looked at him for a second, and stood up from leaning against the tree. He reached into his pocket, and took out his wand, holding against his side.

"Harry..." he said. His voice was nothing like it used to be, it was colder now... it sent chills through Harry's spine. "Do you remember my motto?"

"No professor..." said Harry, extremely confused. He looked Dumbledore over. He was still standing very far away from him, but now that he was standing still, there was something different about him... what was it? Harry looked allover him, scanned him like a robot would. Shoes, robe, wand, beard... everything seemed to be in order.... Then, it hit him! The eyes! They were big, with tiny black pupils surrounded by a red iris. Completely different from how he normally looked.

"Remember... 'Always have a backup plan, or three?'" he hissed. Now Harry knew what happened. Somehow... Voldemort had changed into Dumbledore!

"Well, I have another motto," he hissed, still keeping his distance, "If I can't have it... no one can! AVADA KEDAVRA!"

The green beam flashed out of his wand. Instinctively, Harry fell to the ground, to avoid it. He felt the warmth of the beam soar over him, like a small phoenix.

BAM!

What was that sound? Even with his hands over his ears, Harry knew he heard something. The beam should have hit nothing, though. It should have gone right over Harry's head, and into the forest.

Quickly, Harry looked behind him.

“NOO!” he yelled. Hermione had been hit.

## **Chapter 30- The Phoenix of the Order**

Hermione had fallen to the ground. Her back lay against the hard, cold surface, and she had gone limp all over. She had an expression of terror on her face, wide eyes, and mouth open. It was eerie... she looked alive, even though she was...

“She’s dead...” said Harry to himself. “I can’t believe it...”

“Hermione...” said Ron, shaking. He ran up to her body, and put his ear to her heart, just to make sure. When Harry saw him bury his face into her shirt, he knew he had heard no sound of a heart beating. Hermione had been hit by the Killing Curse, and there was nothing they could do.

“You monster!” yelled Harry, quickly spinning around, pulling his wand out, and brandishing it at Voldemort, tears filling up his eyes. “First you stop me from bringing back my mom... then you kill Sirius... then Colin... now my best friend! Voldemort! You are going to pay!”

“Ha! A pathetic child like you? Defeat me? The idea is laughable...” laughed Voldemort, still looking like Dumbledore... on the outside.

“I’ve done it before, I can do it again,” said Harry, spit shooting from his mouth.

“Yes, but now you don’t have your dear mommy’s little protection, and I am one hundred fold more powerful than I was last time we met!” hissed Voldemort, coming in closer to Harry. Harry scrunched his face up, and went red with rage.

“How dare you look like Dumbledore,” spat Harry. “You’re not even worthy enough to wear one of his socks!”

“Oh dear boy,” said Voldemort, “if only you knew the truth... if only.... You would know who is the superior wizard! Think about it Harry... only when all the colors are mixed together is black created, unlike white which is the absence of all color. Thus, black is superior to white! Evil triumphs over good! Evil is having the entire world mixed into one massive and great entity!”

“Yes, but if you combine all the colors of light,” said Harry, trying to beat Voldemort on the intellectual level, “what do you get? White...” Voldemort made fists, and went red.

“Foolish boy! What is light without pigment to absorb it!?”

“What is pigment but merely the reflection of light!?”

“I can take no more! I failed to kill you, yes, but I will have you anyway! You could have been my right hand, but you shall now become my slave! Imperio!”

The beam shot out of his wand, and straight at Harry. Immediately, Harry felt his body go stiff as the effect of the beam was taking him over. But, Harry had long since learned how to deal with this curse.

Slowly but surely, even with more and more energy coming from Voldemort, Harry resisted the curse, forcing his mind to react only to what he thought.

“Go back. Go back! GO BACK!” yelled Voldemort’s voice in Harry’s head. It was booming so loudly, it was almost impossible to resist. But, Harry concentrated on the little voice he heard, like a little mouse in a corner.

“Go forward... come on then, more! More!” it squeaked... but soon screamed. The more Harry concentrated on that voice, the louder it got. Almost instantly, it overpowered Voldemort’s, and Harry began walking normally right toward him, with a smile on his face.

Voldemort, however, was not smiling. He saw him contort Dumblodore’s face into something that was foreign to that figure, an expression of shock. Voldemort was amazed Harry broke his curse!

“You may have beaten the pathetic Imperius Curse,” he spat, “but let’s see you deal with this! Crucio!” The clear beam that had been connecting the two of them now turned to a deep red.

It hurt for only a second, but Harry soon found himself free of pain, and full of joy. Despite the deaths, him not being able to see his mother, and being about to be killed by Voldemort, Harry dug down deep for a happy thought... he found Cho.

That was more than enough to rub off the Cruciatus Curse. Within seconds, Harry was walking towards Voldemort again, bearing another smile. Voldemort now looked genuinely scared, and Harry swore he saw a single drop of sweat on his forehead.

“Very well then, Mr. Potter,” he said. “I can see that you are more powerful than even I had imagined... well... goodbye!”

For only an instant, the red beam connecting them disappeared, allowing Voldemort to get ready to perform another Killing Curse. This slight delay also gave Harry the chance to do something daring... something he had to do!

“Avada...” began Voldemort. Harry instantly changed his shoulder blades into wings, and shot forward, faster than sound.

“...Kedavra!” he finished. Harry was just feet from him now, and saw the tip of the wand glowing green. A millionth of a second later, he was just inched from him, and Voldemort was doing just what Harry had expected.

There was a flash of white light, and then, where Voldemort had been, there was now a copy of Harry, wings and all. The green beam shot out of his wand, and hit the real Harry, knocking him over.

Was he dead? Was he dying?

No, he couldn't be! He could still feel every one of his limbs working in his brain, everything was registering okay... his plan had worked! Harry jumped up, and hovered into the air, looking at Voldemort's shocked face.

"I guess I'm not as powerful as you thought," chuckled Harry. "My Killing Curse couldn't even kill me. Ha!"

"You will pay, Potter!" yelled Voldemort, looking exactly like Harry, (except for the horrible eyes) shooting up into the air. "Even though I may not be able to kill you in one shot, I can do it in many! Stupefy!" A green ray shot from his wand and Harry, who was too excited from his last maneuver, didn't manage to dodge it. The spell hit him, and Harry fell to the ground.

"Harry!" yelled Ron, all red-faced and eyed, jumping up from Hermione. He quickly took out his wand, and pointed it at Voldemort.

"Korosucide!" he yelled, sending the black beam high in the air, but just missing Voldemort. He flew to the side just in time, and dodged it. Voldemort pointed his wand at Ron, and muttered something. The beam came down and hit Ron, knocking him out, just as it did with Harry.

Harry gave a groan, and closed his eyes. He heard Voldemort coming down from the sky, ready to make his finishing move on both of them. He had won, all hope was lost... there was nothing they could do.

Harry heard him walking up right in front of him now, and pull out his wand from his pocket. He crouched down on the ground next to Harry, and placed his wand on his forehead.

"Now, Harry... I'm feeling nice today, so why don't you tell me... what curse do you want me to kill you with?" he laughed. Harry swore at him.

"Now now dear lad," said Voldemort sarcastically, "even at death, we should not forget our manners now should we? Well then... if you don't want to make the choice, I will have to make it for you!"

Harry closed his eyes, and prepared himself to see his mother. He felt the world around him begin to shake and rattle, and getting extremely warm. What kind of curse had Voldemort put on him?

The heat rose, and the ground shook more furiously. Was he going to be sucked underground? Harry clenched his eyes harder together, and was surprised that he was able to do that. Shouldn't he be dead by now?

Harry quickly opened his eyes, and felt weak at the sight before him. He saw the real Voldemort, not him or Dumbledore, laying there, appearing to be dead. All around him, there was broken earth and above him, there it was.

The golden phoenix.

It was the most beautiful creature Harry had ever laid eyes upon. It was immense, at least the size of an elephant, and it gave a radiant, golden glow that radiated throughout the entire field. It had what appeared to be white cloths revolving all around it, and they appeared to be carried by smaller golden phoenixes. Its eyes were exactly like Dumbledore's, full of warmth and compassion, and the entire thing appeared to be made out of energy rather than matter. It was truly a sight to behold. No wonder Garde had fallen in love with it.

"Harry Potter..." came a voice in Harry's head. It had to be the Phoenix, only a voice that silky and beautiful could belong to a creature that magnificent. "Is this the creature that prevented you from using your Order?"

"You mean... Voldemort?" stuttered Harry.

"Yes..." it said.

"Yes, that is him," said Harry, still in awe at the awesome beast.

"Throughout the entire existence of the Order," said the phoenix, "something like this has never occurred. No one has ever stolen someone else's Order."

"Well... what can we do?" asked Harry.

"We cannot take the power of the Order away from him," said the phoenix, still hovering there, slowly flapping its wings, "that is impossible. However, we can still do the next best thing... give you back your Order."

"You mean," said Harry, shocked and amazed, "that I can use my Order again?"

"Yes. Since you did not use it on who you desired before, it is only right that you get it back."

"Th- thank you phoenix," said Harry.

"I am sorry, Harry Potter," said the phoenix, "but I must leave you now... my kind needs me. And I am even sorrier to say, that I cannot allow you to kill this... Voldemort."

“But, why not!” yelled Harry. The phoenix looked almost hurt by his response. “I am sorry, Harry. Even though he stole your Order, I cannot allow you to kill him. The Order was created to bring life, not to steal it.”

Before Harry could say another word, the phoenix disappeared, along with Voldemort. Instantly, they were gone, returning the ground and everything around them back to exactly the way it was before. All Harry could do was slowly bring himself down on the ground, sit down, lie down, close his eyes, and faint.

## **Chapter 31- The Surprise Order**

“Harry! Harry!” yelled a voice. It rang through Harry’s head, bouncing and echoing all the way. It made his head hurt all over, and he felt as though his face was going to split open. Harry immediately snapped back into consciousness and sat up.

“Ah!” he yelled as soon as he sat up and started rubbing his forehead. Ron put his hand on Harry’s back to prevent him from falling over.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“Yeah,” groaned Harry. The pain was throbbing now, on and off every second or so. The only thing that helped was to rub it.

“What happened?” asked Ron, removing his hand from Harry’s back.

“I’m not really sure,” said Harry, “but I think the Golden Phoenix that started the Order appeared, and took Voldemort away.”

“Whoa,” exclaimed Ron. “Are you sure?”

“Arg,” winced Harry, trying to stand up. “I’m not sure... where’s Hermione? Maybe we can ask her what she saw?” At these words, Ron gave Harry an expression that was an odd combination of surprise, confusion, and sadness.

“Harry... Hermione’s dead,” said Ron slowly. “Remember?”

It was all coming back to Harry now. His Order failing, the duels with Voldemort, him being Dumbledore, and then the phoenix saving him... with Hermione and Lupin being killed in the process.

“Oh Ron... what are we going to do?” said Harry, covering his face with his hands.  
“She’s dead, we’re lost, and for all we know, Voldemort is just waiting for us to go back into that forest and walk right into another one of his traps.”

“Well I know one thing we have to do,” said Ron, looking more serious than Harry had ever seen, “We have to bury her, just like You-Know... Voldemort... did with Colin.”

“But Ron, don’t you think we should bring her back to her family?” asked Harry.

“No,” he said. “Harry, the chances of us getting back are slim to none. We got lucky that last time with the phoenix showing up, but we can’t count on it again. If we get killed, Hermione will never have a proper burial, and she will just be eaten by worms and birds. We have to do this.”

Harry looked at his friend, seeing him in a new light. He had grown up from the Ron Weasley he once knew.

“But if we’re going to bury Hermione,” said Harry, “we have to do the same for Lupin. After all, if it wasn’t for him, we may not even be alive right now. He died trying to save us.”

“Alright,” Ron said quickly and quietly. After a few seconds of just standing there, right in the middle of an infinite field, with a cloudy and windy sky overhead, giving the feeling of a storm coming on, they both came to a silent and simultaneous agreement. They both walked over to their friends, and collapsed on their knees next to them. They mumbled a spell, and the tips of their wands turned into quite large shovels. Harry and Ron began digging into the ground, none of them saying a word, just letting the wind say everything they had to.

Harry wasn’t used to the silence. It was extremely eerie, like being in a dark and haunted house, just waiting for something to jump out from behind you and bite your head off. He had to break it.

“Ron,” said Harry, still digging, “did you... that is Hermione... did you... love her?” At first, Harry thought Ron hadn’t heard him. He just continued shoveling for a few seconds, then he paused, looked at Harry, and dropped his shovel.

“Harry...” he said. “I... I... I.... Wait.... What’s that sound?”

Harry stopped digging for a second, and put his hand to his ear. Just beyond the sound of the oncoming thunder and rain, Harry heard the most out of place sound... he heard an ‘oink’.

“It sounds like... a pig,” said Harry, giving a confused look. He stood up, and stuck his ear out further in the direction he heard it coming from; he saw Ron do the same.

“Oink...” came the noise from very far away. It was just slightly louder than a pin drop, and Harry wasn’t even sure if it was a real sound.

“Oink.” There it was again! Only louder this time, much louder in fact, as if it was rushing towards he and Ron. Harry began walking closer toward the sound, and Ron followed him. Whatever was making that noise was definitely coming closer. Harry had to be prepared: he took out his wand.

“Oink.”

“Ron,” said Harry, almost laughing at himself, “I think it is a pig.”

“A pig?”

“Oink!” came the sound again, sounding very close.

“Harry!” yelled Ron. “It is a pig!” He ran right up next to Harry, and put his hand over his eyes, to try and see farther away. Harry did the same, and not too far away, he saw a small pink dot next to a larger blue dot running up to them, along with a red dot above them.

“What are those things around the pig?” asked Ron, squinting. Harry tried to focus on it, and was amazed at what he saw. As the figures got closer, he could definitely make out the pink spot being a pig, but the blue dot was not... it was a wizard! Harry could make out the long, blue flowing robe. And the red dot was a bird... a phoenix!

“Harry!” yelled Ron. “It’s Dumbledore and the phoenix!”

Ron was right, it was Dumbledore! The figures were no more than a hundred feet away now, and Harry could see them perfectly. Harry and Ron began running towards them, unable to believe their luck.

“Professor Dumbledore!” yelled Harry. “Is that you!?

“Yes it is, Harry,” he said, stopping when he was just a few feet away from Harry. The phoenix was perched on his shoulder, that was probably Fawkes.

Even though Dumbledore wasn’t wearing his usual, joyous face, Harry was still unbelievably happy to see him. He could have hugged Dumbledore, right then and there. With him around, there was no way Voldemort could touch them.

“Where is Voldemort?” said Dumbledore.

“He’s gone,” said Harry, questions forming inside his head. How did Dumbledore know they were here? What was with the pig? How did he get the phoenixes back?

“He’s gone, has he? Well... that is most unfortunate.”

There was a second of awkward silence.

“Professor, how did you know we were here?” said Ron, asking Harry’s question for him.

“That is all thanks to this pig here,” said Dumbledore. “Or, as you know her, Mrs. Arabella Figg. She led me to the forest where I met Voldemort. He turned into a copy of me, and ran away. We tried to follow him, but we somehow lost him. Later, we heard the song of the golden phoenix, and followed it here.”

“Oh, that’s right!” said Harry. “Wormtail didn’t kill Arabella, he just turned her into a pig, and she ran away!”

“Wormtail killed someone?” said Dumbledore, looking extremely serious.

“Yes,” said Harry, “He killed Lupin, and Voldemort stunned Sirius, and killed Hermione and Colin.”

“Colin Creevey?”

“Yes.”

“Oh my... oh my....”

Just then, the pig flashed a bright white, and Mrs. Figg was standing right in front of Harry, just as she had appeared before, not a hoof in sight.

“Mrs. Figg!” said Harry. “You’re back!”

“Harry,” she said, “you didn’t think I’d stay that way forever now did you?”

“Err... I guess not...” said Harry, not really knowing what he thought. Whether or not she was going to transform back was really one of the last things on his mind. All he wanted to deal with now was Hermione, Lupin, and Colin... but what could he do for them? Nothing... he had already used his Order and- but wait!

“Mrs. Figg!” yelled Harry excitedly. “I remember, just before Voldemort was about to kill me, that Golden Phoenix who started the Order appeared, and he took him away! Then, he told me that I could have my Order back since I didn’t get to use it on who I wanted to!” Mrs. Figg’s eyes widened.

“So... that means you can rescue either Hermione or Lupin!” she said.

“Yes! And-” Harry stopped being excited. Mrs. Figg’s last statement hit him like a rock, only much, much more painful.

He was going to have to choose whether to bring back Hermione or Lupin.

“What is it Harry?” asked Ron, looking excited.

“I can only bring one of them back,” said Harry in a monotone voice, and not blinking. “I have to choose which one to bring back...”

“And you’re going to have to choose quickly,” said Mrs. Figg, looking at her watch.  
“There’s a very small window of a little less than two hours to revive someone that’s died by using an Order. From my estimates, you have only a few minutes.”

Harry's mind was racing. He had a few minutes to choose which life was more valuable: one of his best and smartest friends, or a fully trained and invincible werewolf. How could he be expected to make this difficult of a choice?

"Arabella..." said Harry, "I think you need to decide for me... I... I... can't."

"Harry," she whispered, "this is something that you have to do."

Harry turned back to the two bodies of Hermione and Lupin, laying side by side from when he and Ron were beginning to bury them. He tried to imagine an invisible numerical rating above each corpse, giving him the value of their life....

No! That was wrong! How could he rate someone's life? Who was he to make this type of decision? Who was he to play god? No matter which choice he made, it would be right... and yet it would be wrong.

"Harry..." Ron whispered into his ear. Harry could tell, from not even looking at him that he was on the verge of crying. "Harry... I did love her..."

Harry closed his eyes tight, to try and not burst into tears. That settled it... he had to choose her.

"Liberate Hermione ex inferis!" Harry yelled. He threw his arms out toward her body, and felt the phoenix soar past him, and begin to fly over her body. Another phoenix quickly appeared out of nowhere, and joined Fawkes in circling her.

"Liberate Hermione ex inferis!" he yelled again. The white energy flowed from his palms to Hermione's corpse, and the phoenixes were flying madly, just like before. Harry could feel the life force flowing through him, it made him feel alive all over, like he was being born again.

Hermione's limp body began to hover into the air, in the middle of the circle the soaring phoenixes were making in the air. She began to rotate, and give off a bright, white glow. The phoenixes stopped flying around her, and instantly froze where it was. But, Hermione kept on spinning, faster and faster, the light she gave off became brighter and brighter until.... It all went away.

Instantly, all of it, the white light, the energy, everything, it all went away. Hermione fell to the ground.

"Ouch!" she moaned when her body came into contact with the earth. She rubbed her forehead and slowly opened her eyes. "Wh- where am I?" Ron went running over to her and immediately embraced her in a massive hug.

Harry couldn't help but smile, he felt as though he had made the right choice... but Lupin was still dead.

“Oh, Remus...” cried Mrs. Figg. She ran over to him, and hugged him, just as Ron had. Harry began to feel guilty inside... had he made the best decision? He just chose the one he was better friends with, just like he had done before when trying to figure out who to let on the Quidditch team: Bill or Ron. He chose the one whom his other friend liked... did that really mean he should have chosen her. If only he could have brought them both back....

Harry looked over at Dumbledore, who had been silent throughout the entire thing. Then, Harry remembered, Dumbledore didn’t know about the Order! He had no idea what was going on! Even so... he should still know whether or not he had made the right decision.

“Um... Professor Dumbledore...” said Harry, “do you think I made the right decision?” Dumbledore continued to just look ahead, not at anything in particular, but mostly in the direction of the storm coming.

“Oh Harry...” he said quietly and slowly. He started walking towards Lupin, his hands folded together. Harry wondered what he was doing. He followed him until he was just a few feet away from Lupin. He closed his eyes, and put out his arms so that they were right above Lupin. What was he doing?

“Harry...” he said again, very slowly and quietly, “I am part of the Order of the Phoenix.”

## **Chapter 32- Truth and True Correspondents**

Harry's mind exploded. What was going on!? Was Dumbledore playing some sort of cruel joke!? No, that wasn't like him at all... maybe... there was an infinitesimally small chance... maybe... he was really part of the Order...

"Liberate Remus ex inferis," Dumbledore said extremely slowly.

Just as with Harry before, white energy flowed from Dumblldore's palms to Lupin's body below. The phoenixes flew over above Lupin now, and began circling above his body, faster and faster, more and more white energy was created. Lupin began rising up from the ground, and right in the middle of the circle created. He flashed a brilliant white, for only an instant, then it all disappeared, just as it did before. Lupin crashed down to the ground.

"Ouch!" he yelled, just like Hermione, showing that he was very much alive.

"Remus?" said Mrs. Figg, taking her face out of her hands. She looked up, and saw Lupin there, rubbing his head.

"Where am I?" he said.

"Remus!" she yelled again, running up to him and hugging him.

All Harry could do was stand there, mouth open and eyes wide. It took Dumbledore touching him on the shoulder to bring him back to reality.

"Well Harry," he said, the familiar joy back in his voice and eyes, "are you happy now?"

Harry looked before him. He saw Ron and Hermione embracing each other like never before and the same with Arabella and Remus. Leave it to being on the brink of death to bring people closer together. Harry couldn't help but feel happy for them.

"Yes... yes I am...." said Harry dazed. Then, snapping back, he said, "Professor... I didn't know you were part of the Order of the Phoenix."

"Oh yes..." said Dumbledore, talking about it like it was a child he was not especially proud of. "I am Grade's great-great-great-grandson. I used to be proud to be a member of the Order, until they started killing people."

"Killing?" asked Harry. "I thought you could only help people with Orders."

"Oh yes, of course you can only 'help' people with an Order, Harry," said Dumbledore. "However, when you bring someone back from the dead, are you not killing them in the afterlife? Just as sending someone in this reality to the afterlife is considered murder,

isn't taking someone away from it and bringing here the same thing? You, Harry should know that the afterlife does, in fact exist."

"How would I know, professor?"

"Arabella here told me of your exceptional job with the Advanced Defense Against the Dark Arts O.W.L. As you may know, you are not the first person in history to have put off pain for so long. You see, when someone concentrates on happiness so much while putting off imaginary pain, if they are good enough, they become enveloped in bliss, and a given a glimpse of the world that lay beyond ours. The place that you went, Harry, was, indeed, a piece of Heaven."

This information hit Harry hard. He had never even thought about death like that before. Is bringing people back from the dead killing them in the afterlife? Is Heaven really like what he saw it as?

"As I said before, Harry, to the organized mind, death is just but the next great adventure. Why would you take someone away from it? I teach all of my most valuable people that death is to be respected just as much, if not more, than life. You, Harry, are one of my most valuable people."

Harry just stood there, in silence, having no idea what to say. He was amazed by this man's brilliance, and by Harry's own inability to see beyond two dimensions.

"Oh my!" exclaimed Dumbledore, looking at his watch. "The end of school feast is going to begin in five minutes! We will have to hurry back if we are to get there in time!"

"Do you know how to get back, professor?" asked Harry. "This place doesn't exactly look like Hogwarts grounds."

"That's because its not," said Dumbledore. "Hogwarts is on the other side of the forest, and there's absolutely no way we'll make it in time if we run.... We'll have to Apparate."

"But professor," said Harry, "Me, Ron and Hermione don't know how."

"Oh don't worry about that. I have enough magical power for all of you. Just hold onto my hand. Arabella! You can surely Apparate to the entrance of Hogwarts with Lupin and Sirius, can't you?"

"Certainly," she said, holding Lupin on one shoulder, and propping Sirius (who was just waking up) on her other. Ron and Hermione came over, and they took a hold of Harry's hand, who was holding onto Dumbledore.

"Well then... off we go!" yelled Dumbledore. Harry gasped. All of the world around him turned pitch black for an instant, melting everything into one infinite oblivion. Then, just as quick as it happened, it was over.

Harry felt out of breath, as if he had jogged the entire distance here.

“Alright then Harry?” asked Dumbledore, letting go of his hand.

“Yeah, great,” said Harry, catching his breath. He stood up and brushed himself off, and walked inside along with everyone else. Mrs. Figg, Sirius, and Lupin, however stayed outside, as to not be noticed. As they walked inside, two questions were still burning inside Harry’s mind.

“Professor Dumbledore,” he asked, “I have a question.”

“Ask away Harry,” he said.

“Well... for one... how did my Order help Voldemort? I mean, I thought it could only help you if you were hurt, and he looked perfectly healthy to me.”

“Oh Harry, an Order is much more complex than that. You should see the MMSC for it, oh boy! I could barely make sense of it!”

Harry didn’t feel like asking what an MMSC was, it would probably only confuse him more.

“Anyway, Harry, an Order will work on anyone, young or old, dead or perfectly healthy. It does not restore someone to their normal health, because if it was used on someone who had been hurt, but was hurt anyway beforehand, they would return to their normal and hurt state. So, it amplifies your normal state, and then returns you to that.

“Now, to do more advanced spells, you need more magical power, a power that is derived almost directly from your state of being. So, if you have had an Order put on you, you will have an even higher magical power. And if you already had a massive amount of magical power, as in the case of Voldemort, it will grow to a size that is off any chart I know. Now that Voldemort has this almost infinite magical power, he can invent any spell he wants, and utilize it any way he desires.”

“So, he’s pretty much invincible now?” asked Harry, beginning to feel afraid inside.

“Oh no, Harry. As you have seen, almost every time Voldemort has been defeated it is because he has made just one error, or underestimated his opponents. Those are his faults. As long as he continues in his current state of mind, no matter what kind of spells he has at his disposal, there will be a way to defeat him.”

“Also, professor, how did you know to use your Order on Lupin? I didn’t ask you to. Did you just figure it out yourself?”

“Well, mostly yes, Harry. But, as I’m sure you’ve found out by now, all Animagi are connected through telepathy. I could hear your cry for help loud and clear.”

With the end of that sentence, they had reached the entrance to the Great Hall. Dumbledore threw open the doors of the Great Hall, revealing all of Hogwarts school... everyone except the four of them that is. Harry, Ron and a very confused looking Hermione sat down at the Gryffindor table, and Dumbledore ran to the head of the room. Just as he sat down in his great chair, though, he sat up again, to give his speech.

“Once again... another year has passed us, quickly for some... not fast enough for others,” he said, looking at Fred and George’s general direction. “We have all accomplished much this year, and you should all be proud of what you have done, no matter how large or small you may think your accomplishments were.”

There was some applause, and he began again.

“Also, I would like to announce that the new Minister of Magic is in this room right now.”

Everyone excitedly looked at the teachers at the front of the room. Everyone had been waiting for this moment for a long time. Harry tallied off the teachers than ran in his head, seeing which ones ran for the position, and which ones didn’t. But, he deduced quickly, none of them ran... none of them except for...

“Me,” said Dumbledore. There was an explosion of applause, and everyone in the room (except for some of the Slytherins) stood up and cheered. It was accolade like Harry had never seen before. Had all of them really wanted Dumbledore to win? Not that he had any doubt in his mind that Dumbledore was, by far, the best candidate.

“Yes, yes... and, for my first acts as Minister of Magic, I hereby decree these three things! Number one: school shall begin one week later than usual... I think we could all use a bit more vacation.”

There was applause and whistles coming from all over. Even the Slytherins cheered for Dumbledore this time. In fact, the only ones who weren’t applauding were Fred and George.

“Oh man,” they said, “the first time they give us extra vacation and we can’t take advantage of it!”

“Second!” Dumbledore continued. “I hereby allow all Hogwarts students to take their wands home over the Summer holiday, and allow them to use whatever magic they want... as long as its not an illegal spell.”

If Harry thought the cheering for the last decree had been huge, it was nothing compared to this. Once again, only Fred and George looked miserable.

“And lastly,” said Dumbledore, “I will NOT allow any more of these disgusting cover-ups of Voldemort’s terrible and inhuman acts of violence!”

There was no applause. Everyone had expected some sort of new and fun gift, this took them totally by surprise.

“And as my first way of not covering up his actions, I shall tell you the reason why I am late to this feast.”

“Oh no,” thought Harry to himself. “He’s going to say what happened...”

“There was an attack on three students and a teacher earlier, and it was done by none other than Voldemort himself, along with one of his cohorts. If it had not been due to some extreme bravery by certain students... more than one member of this school would have died in that past two hours.”

Everyone in the room turned white and began frantically looking around the room to see who was missing. That would be the person that was dead. Harry put his head down, anticipating the moment when they would figure it out. It wasn’t long before Colin’s little brother, Dennis, stood up and screamed.

“COLIN!” he yelled at the top of his lungs until he was red in the face. The tiny boy ran out of the room crying, everybody in the room watching him go.

“Yes,” said Dumbledore, “Colin Creevey is dead. Though many of you may not have known him, I can assure you, he died the most honorable of deaths: sacrificing his own life so that another may live. So like Cedric Diggory last year, let us all raise our glasses to Colin... Colin Creevey!”

“To Colin!” everyone in the room said at the same time. Even though it was by far the most extravagant and delicious feast Harry had ever attended, and even though there were Gryffindor banners and colors everywhere from them winning the House Cup for the fifth year in a row, it was also the most quiet and solemn feast he had ever been to. No one dared to say a word... no one.

The day of the feast came and went, and the last day of school finally arrived. Everyone was waiting outside of Hogwarts, right where the Hogwarts Express would come and pick them up, to take them home for the summer vacation.

Harry stood there, talking with Ron, Hermione, and Cho, waiting for the train to come, when he felt someone behind him. He turned around, and saw two Muggles he had never seen before. One was a tall and thin man, with a large moustache and almost a completely bald head. The other was a short and skinny woman with long, brown hair. They were both crying, and looking down at Harry.

“Are you... are you Harry Potter?” asked the man.

“Yes,” said Harry, not really knowing how to feel.

"We... we're Colin's parents," he said.

"Oh... oh my," said Harry, "I'm so sorry about Colin...."

"It's not your fault," said the woman, blowing her nose. Harry felt terrible inside... it WAS his fault. "We just wanted to see the boy that our son loved so much... yes.... He chose a great person to idolize."

Harry was speechless. He felt like an idiot as he watched them walk away. He saw them return to Dumbledore, and he waved to him. He had evidently told them where Harry was so they could see him at least, but he hadn't told him why Colin had really died... he didn't tell anyone really. He didn't want anyone to think it was Harry's fault that he died, he just left it at the fact that he sacrificed himself for someone, and died honorably.

Harry turned around, expecting to see train tracks, but instead came face to face with Bill, the boy who had tried out for the Gryffindor Quidditch team at the beginning of the year.

"Hello Harry," he said, looking especially happy.

"Oh... hello Bill," said Harry, trying to quickly change his emotion from mournful to happy. "How are you?"

"Oh I'm fine... been practicing my Quidditch," he said, rubbing his hands together. "You're going to need another new five players next year and... hey! Why not me? I almost made it this year after all!"

"I'm sure you'll make it next year," said Harry, extending his arm to Bill. He took it and shook it vigorously, with a wide smile on his face. As he shook up and down, Harry heard something fall onto the ground.

"What was that?" asked Harry. He let go of Bill's hand, and looked down. Right next to Bill's feet, on the ground, he saw a Snitch. Harry quickly picked it up, and held it in front of him, about to offer it to Bill.

Suddenly, spikes shot out of the Snitch, just like the one in the Quidditch final. Harry quickly let go of it before any of the spikes impaled his hand again, and let it fall to the ground. He looked up at Bill's terrified face.

"Harry... I.... I didn't mean to hurt you... I mean... um...."

"You switched the Snitches!" said Harry, rubbing his hand.

"Well I had to get revenge on you for what you did," said Bill seriously, sounding almost not aware of what he was saying.

"What did I do to deserve that?"

“You fudged the results of the last tryout, the one that came down to either me or Ron. You changed the results so that your friend got on the team!”

Suddenly, it all came together for Harry. The person who had been sending him letters all year hadn’t been doing it because he knew that he stole Fawkes! Bill was writing them! And it was because of the tryouts!

“So you’ve been writing those letters! You’re the one who had been threatening me all year long!” yelled Harry.

“Yes! I did it!” yelled Bill, looking a little insane. Evidently, he was so proud that Harry hadn’t figured out it was him, and he got away with revenge, that he was letting it go to his head. “It was ingenious! It was a perfect plan! Ha ha ha ha! I did it!”

“What’s going on here?” asked Dumbledore, breaking through the crowd to get to see what the disturbance was all about.

“I DID IT! HA HA HA!” yelled Bill, throwing his hands up into the air and causing everyone to look at him.

“What did he do?” asked Dumbledore.

“He was the one who switched the Snitches at the Quidditch Final!” said Harry. “He’s the one who put me in the Hospital Wing! He’s been threatening me all year long!”

“Is this true?” Dumbledore asked Bill.

“Yes! I did it! All by myself! Isn’t it amazing... ingenious?”

“Why don’t you come with me Bill?” said Dumbledore, grabbing Bill by the arm and leading him back up to the castle. “Don’t worry Harry, he will be taken care of.”

“Okay professor,” said Harry, watching him take Bill all the way back up to the castle. He wondered if he would be seeing Bill next year... even if he did, he knew he was not going to be on the Gryffindor Quidditch team, that was for sure.

“Some people are just so weird,” said Hermione, turning away from Bill.

“Yeah, like you, Harry!” yelled Ron, unexpectedly.

“What do you mean?” asked Harry.

“You changed the results of the race so that I got on the team!” he yelled. “How could you do that?”

“Um... because I’m your friend,” said Harry.

“I didn’t want to get on the team because I’m your friend,” said Ron through gritted teeth. “If Bill was better, you should have picked him!”

“But he wasn’t better, it was a tie,” said Harry.

“It doesn’t matter! You still-” suddenly, Ron went stiff for a second, his eyes flashed, and his head hung down. He was showing all of the signs of someone who had just had their memory erased. Harry looked behind Ron, to see who could have put the spell on him, when he saw little Aylar, with his wand out.

“Aylar!” yelled Harry. “Did you erase Ron’s memory?”

“Only the memory that you changed the results of the tryout,” said Aylar, putting his wand back into his pocket.

“Aylar! How could you do that!?”

“Harry, come on, he was practically about to kill you, and your friendship would be gone forever,” said Aylar, crossing his arms.

“But... you... and... Ron...” Harry mumbled. He couldn’t think of anything to say. He was appalled at what Aylar did, but was thankful that Ron had forgotten about the little incident. Yep, the latter definitely outweighed the con. “Thanks Aylar.”

“Don’t mention it. I do it all the time for them,” he said, indicating the group of Gryffindor first years.

“Hi Harry!” they all yelled at once.

“Over the summer, we’re all going to get together and practice Quidditch!” said Chris excitedly.

“Yeah, and maybe we’ll be able to make the team next year,” said Mike.

“Oh my god! That would roxorz my soxorz!” yelled Joe.

“I don’t know, the odds of getting hurt by a Bludger during a game are fairly high. According to my calculations, which are of course based on-”

Harry just merely turned his attention away from them, thankful that he wouldn’t have to see them for over three months. He’d need that time away to mentally prepare himself to have to deal with them for the rest of the entire year....

“Hey Harry, the train is here,” said Ron, tapping Harry on the shoulder. Harry put his arm around his friends, Ron, Hermione and Cho, and the four of them walked onto the train, leaving Hogwarts.

On the train, Harry, Ron, and Hermione got a room to themselves, while Cho decided to take some time and catch up with her old friends in another compartment. The four of them all talked about their year together as the train went along, taking them home.

“Hey Hermione,” said Ron, looking like he had suddenly thought of something.

“Whatever happened to Krum? Remember? At the beginning of the year you said you two weren’t seeing each other anymore, and you wouldn’t tell us why.... Well... now will you tell us?”

Hermione put a smile on, and turned slightly red.

“Oh fine,” she said. “Well, everything was going great at his house... we were having lots of fun. I guess he thought we were having enough fun together to... well....”

“What?” asked Ron and Harry together.

“To... get married.”

Harry and Ron burst out into uncontrollable laughter.

“He asked you to marry him?” coughed Ron, several minutes later, sitting up and trying to recover from his laughing fit.

“Yes he did, and I thought that was just too much of him. I didn’t want to be with someone who was THAT spontaneous.... So, I left him.”

“Wow Hermione,” said Harry. “Just... wow...”

The rest of the trip went along that way, each of them remembering their fifth year, the good and the bad, the funny and the terrible. Finally, they arrived at Platform 9 ¾ , and they all got off.

“See you Harry!” said Hermione, running off to see her parents.

“See you later Hermione!” yelled Harry back.

“Goodbye Harry,” said Cho.

“Goodbye Cho,” said Harry, giving her a goodbye kiss as she went off to go home with her parents.

“Harry,” asked Ron, “are you sure you wouldn’t rather come home with us for the holidays?”

“Maybe later, Ron,” said Harry, “but first, I want to have some fun.... The Dursleys don’t know that Dudley’s a wizard... that will be a fun surprise.”

THE END